Assessing the Ward Committee System:

The case of Greater Kokstad Municipality

by
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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis, I declare that it is my original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third-party rights, and that I have not previously submitted this work, in its entirety or in part, to any other institution for purposes of obtaining a qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Public participation is a key aspect of developmental local government. Flowing from this, a ward committee system was introduced in South Africa, as a conduit for driving public participation programmes. This study set out to explore the experiences of ward committee members in Greater Kokstad Municipality (GKM). The intention was to evaluate the ward committee system as a vehicle for meaningful public participation in the integrated development planning processes.

This study sought to analyse the interactional dynamics of aspects of the experiences of selected ward committee members of their participation in the ward committee system as a conduit for public participation in GKM. The research was located within a qualitative research tradition, and took the form of a small-scale case study. The data-generation research techniques included focus group interview sessions with ward committee members; and the analysis of key documents, whose intention was to understand the context or setting in which ward committees operated in GKM.

Findings of the study revealed that the ward committee system was marred with challenges that often rendered it ineffective as a voice of communities in integrated development planning processes. The reasons for dysfunctionalities and functionalities in the ward committee system were largely a mix of structural, political, social, economic and operational dynamics; and functionality of ward committees was often weak and varied, and depended largely on the context and agency of ward committees.

The findings of the study point to the fact that those involved in fulfilling the constitutional promise of public participation, must consider the interactional dynamics of ideological, political, and operational aspects of the ward committee system as a vehicle for meaningful public participation. Furthermore, the study reveals conventional understandings of public participation, which are mostly oblivious of its political and ideological dimensions. The call made by this study is for a paradigmatic shift towards the understanding of public participation as a political and ideological construct, rather than a purely technical construct.

Findings also suggest that creating new invited spaces for public participation may not be sufficient to empower communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Therefore, for the ward committee system to work, there is a need to problematise conventional understandings of public participation, and relocate public participation within the radical politics of integrated development planning (Hickey & Mohan, 2005: 237). This would

however require relevant mechanisms to ensure that the ward committee system supports the transformation of power relations in the realm of public participation.

Keywords: ward committee system, public participation, local government, developmental local government, invited spaces, invented/claimed spaces

OPSOMMING

Openbare deelname is 'n belangrike aspek van ontwikkelingsgerigte plaaslike regering. Voortspruitend hieruit is 'n wykskomiteestelsel as 'n kanaal vir die bestuur van programme vir openbare deelname in Suid-Afrika bekendgestel. Die huidige studie onderneem om die ervarings van wykskomiteelede in die Groter Kokstad Munisipaliteit (GKM) te verken. Die doel was om die wykskomiteestelsel as 'n voertuig vir betekenisvolle openbare deelname aan geïntegreerde ontwikkelingsbeplanningsprosesse te ondersoek.

Met hierdie studie is gepoog om die interaksionele dinamika van aspekte van die ervarings van geselekteerde wykskomiteelede se deelname aan die wykskomiteestelsel as 'n kanaal vir openbare deelname in die GKM te ontleed. Die navorsing volbinne 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingstradisie, en is in die vorm van 'n kleinskaalse gevallestudie onderneem. Die navorsingstegnieke vir datagenerering het fokusgroeponderhoudsessies met wykskomiteelede en die ontleding van belangrike dokumente ingesluit. Die doel was om 'n begrip te verkry van die konteks of omgewing waarin wykskomitees in die GKM bedryf word. Bevindinge van die studie het getoon dat die wykskomiteestelsel belemmer word deur uitdagings wat dit dikwels oneffektief maak as 'n stem van gemeenskappe in geïntegreerde ontwikkelingsbeplanningprosesse. Die redes vir wanfunksionering en funksionaliteit in die wykskomiteestelsel kan grootliks toegeskryf word aan 'n mengsel van strukturele, politieke, sosiale, ekonomiese en operassionele werkinge, en funksies van wykskomitees was dikwels swak en gevarieerd, en grootliks afhanklik van die konteks en werking van wykskomitees.

Die bevindinge van die studie dui op die feit dat diegene wat betrokke is by die nakoming die grondwetlike belofte van openbare deelname, die interaksionele dinamika van ideologiese, politieke, en operasionele aspekte van die wykskomitee stelsel as 'n voertuig vir betekenisvolle openbare deelname moet beskou. Verder het die studie ‘n probleem met die konvensionele begrip van openbare deelname, wat meestal onbewus van politieke en ideologiese dimensies is. Wat hierdie studie bepleit is 'n paradigmatiese verskuiwing na die begrip van openbare deelname as 'n politieke en ideologiese konstruk, eerder as 'n suiwer tegniese konstruk.

Die bevindinge dui ook daarop dat die skep van nuwe genooide ruimtes vir publieke deelname moontlik nie voldoende is om gemeenskappe te bemagtig om sinvol aan besluitnemingsprosesse deel te neem nie. Vir die wykskomiteestelsel om te werk, is daar dus 'n behoefte daaraan om konvensionele begrippe van openbare deelname te bevraagteken, en openbare deelname binne die radikale politiek van geïntegreerde ontwikkelingsbeplanning

te hervestig (Hickey & Mohan, 2005: 237). Dit sou egter relevante meganismes vereis om te verseker dat die wykskomiteestelsel die transformasie van magsverhoudings op die gebied van openbare deelname ondersteun.

Sleutelwoorde: wykskomiteestelsel, openbare deelname, plaaslike regering, genooide ruimtes, geskepde/opgeëiste ruimtes

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late husband, Sthembile Mbhele, who passed on in 2002, in our fourth year of marriage. Amongst other things that we had promised each other, was that we would encourage each other to pursue further studies, at least to the level of a masters' degree. Unfortunately, I could not accomplish this by the year upon which we had agreed, but I told myself that I would eventually do so, even if it was long after the period of two years we had promised each other. Now, I have fulfilled what we had promised each other.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BLAs	: Black Local Authorities
COGTA	: Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs
DLG	: Developmental Local Government
DPLG	: Department of Provincial and Local Government
EC	: Eastern Cape
GKM	: Greater Kokstad Municipality
IDP	: Integrated Development Plan/Planning
KPA	: Key Performance Areas
KPI	: Key Performance Indicators
KZN	: KwaZulu-Natal
LED	: Local Economic Development
LGNF	: Local Government Negotiation Forum
MEC	: Member of Executive Council
PMS	: Performance Management Systems
SALGA	: South African Local Government Association
WC	: Ward Committee/s
WCS	: Ward Committee System
WPS	: Ward Participatory System
RSA	: Republic of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The rationale for local government emerges from the necessity to promote values of democracy, expand and improve delivery of basic services and facilitate participation of communities in the development of their own areas (Sikander, 2015: 171). This suggests that a local government must create a governance atmosphere or space where there is effective participation of people in what local government is purporting to be doing on behalf of the communities. Local government can no longer decide for the people what is good for them; it must create invited spaces for communities to sit around the development table and agree on what is good for them. The rationale for the proximity of local government to communities is for allowing it to fulfil its constitutional duty of mobilising active citizenship in its efforts to improve living standards in communities.

Part of the South African response to the call made above has been through legislative reform. For instance, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998) (Republic of South Africa, (RSA) 1998a) provides for the establishment of the ward committee system (WCS), which is a structure composed of democratically elected community representatives whose responsibility is to mediate between municipal councils and communities. A ward committee is understood and positioned as a conduit for local people to participate in and take control of the processes of meeting their development needs. A ward committee must be an activist entity, an entity of agents of social change (Sikander, 2015: 171), capable of mobilising communities to participate in finding solutions for their own developmental problems.

The intention of this chapter is to set the tone, to level the ground, for the study whose intention is to explore the experiences of ward committee members within Greater Kokstad Municipality (GKM) of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation, as an agent of social change. The purpose is to interrogate the ward committee system as a vehicle to ensure that local people participate actively in their own development, in line with the understanding that participation in local governance and development should be an active process in which people take self-decided initiative in solving their own development problems.

1.2 Background to the Study

During the apartheid era, participation in local governance had no constitutional protection, and was therefore characterised largely by the lack of invited spaces for community participation in development planning (Williams, 2006: 200). There was no room for public participation, particularly for the majority that were denied political rights; only a small proportion of the population participated in making decisions about development on behalf of the politically silenced majority. After the first democratic elections in 1994, one of the priorities of the democratic government was to ensure participatory governance within both the government and civil society movement (African National Congress (ANC), 1994:8). The rationale for the existence of local government was therefore founded on the intent to make government accessible to citizens, but most importantly to institute mechanisms, systems and processes for citizens to participate in the political and socio-economic processes that affect their lives (Reddy, 1996:3).

Flowing from the above perspective, local government is therefore tasked with the duty of democratising development by promoting active and authentic participation by communities (Craythorne, 1997:13). In other words, municipalities must set up platforms and strategies for public participation, and must especially encourage participation by marginalised sections of our society (RSA, 1998b). This therefore suggests that municipalities must, as a matter of constitutional loyalty, hinge their duty to lead community development on people empowerment and participation as drivers of their actions. In this instance, development will not just be development for itself; it will be development for the people by the people.

Because of these developments, the ward committee system was born in 2003, as a mechanism to open an invited space for communities to participate in the decision relating to the planning and implementation of their own development (Smith, 2008:4). The ward committee system presented an opportunity for government to take development and governance back to the hands of the people (Smith, 2008:4). In other words, the intention of the WCS was to ensure that municipalities did not serve themselves, but that they functioned for the betterment and advancement of communities. Thus, the ward committee system was to function as a voice of the local people, and foreground their voice in matters of local governance. Such a perspective implies that the WCS must serve as a vehicle for communities to make their views and needs known to the municipal council, and bridge the decades-old gap between communities and municipal officials in terms of how development gets done.

1.3 Problem Statement

Prior to 2005, GKM was a collective executive type of municipality, with the Municipal Executive Committee as an authority. The Municipal Executive Committee is established as the principal committee of the council in terms of Section 45 (1) (a)-(c) of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a). In the case of GKM, this suggests that the municipality did not have ward committees.

That being the case, through a council resolution, the council applied to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of the then Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs (now called the Department of Corporative Government and Traditional Affairs) for an amendment of municipal type in terms of Section 12 of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a). The application was approved through the amendment of the Section 12 of the Act (GKM, 2004:8). This allowed GKM to graduate to a collective executive system combined with a WCS type of municipality. What informed such a change was the intention to provide invited spaces for matters of local concern to be discussed and guided by ward committees (GKM, 2004:8). The result of the approval was GKM establishing its first six ward committees, which later became eight ward committees in line with adaptations to municipal demarcations (GKM, 2004: 33).

The establishment of the WCS in the GKM was viewed by many as a progressive development, which would signal a move away from apartheid models of doing development. However, despite the establishment of ward committees, anecdotal reports suggest that the WCS in GKM have largely been unable to influence the direction of how development is done, and has therefore been unable to rise to the occasion.

Reports reveal that the WCS in GKM is embroiled in teething problems, which has had a debilitating effect on its influence on the trajectory of development planning in the area. However, concerns about the effectiveness of the WCS are not unique to GKM; they apply to the WCS across the province. For instance, the current MEC for KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Corporative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Ms Nomusa Dube, is on record as expressing concern that most ward committees in KwaZulu-Natal are dysfunctional and are therefore unable to execute the mandate for which they were established in the first place (SABC News, 2010:1).

Anecdotal reports about the ineffectiveness and functionality of the WCS resonate with the statement of the MEC, which therefore elevates the fact that the WCS is a matter of research

interest. Such a view stems from the very mandate of the WCS, which is the elevation of the voice of communities in matters of development planning. If the WCS is to provide an invited space that is capable of leading to robust public participation, it must be functional and effective. A dysfunctional WCS constitutes a missed opportunity for the local government sphere to fulfil the democratising promise of the democratic government (Cornwall, 2008: 269).

Flowing from this, the current study therefore sought to analyse the interactional dynamics of the experiences of ward committee members with respect to the WCS as a conduit for public participation. The intention was to evaluate the system to understand how the WCS rises to the occasion or not in GKM.

1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of selected ward committee members within GKM of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

1.4.1 Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following key questions:

- What are the experiences of ward committee members of the WCS in the GKM?
- What are the contestations, tensions and contradictions in these constructions and representations?
- What are the implications of this for the implementation of the WCS in GKM, and in South Africa in general?

1.4.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore and understand the experiences of selected ward committee members of their experiences of the WCS.
- Explore the potential barriers, obstacles and opportunities to the maximum functionality of the WCS.
- Assess the extent to which the WCS in GKM serves as a vehicle for public participation.
- Map out what the implications of the findings are for the effective implementation of the WCS in GKM, and South Africa in general.

1.5 Hypothesis Testing

A hypothesis refers to an intelligent guess, an attempt to provide a possible solution to a research problem as a basis for investigating a research problem, which may result in either confirmation or disconfirmation of the proposed response (Welman & Kruger, 1999:11). A hypothesis is therefore a tentative assumption or preliminary statement about the anticipated relationship between two or more variables under investigation. The purpose of a hypothesis is therefore to provide a framework for drawing meaningful conclusions pertaining to the key research questions and is a response to the call that provoking questions on any subject requires immediate, but well considered, solutions to identified problems (Baloyi, 2013:5).

Based on this, the current study sought to test the strength of the following hypothetical statements:

- The WCS provides an effective vehicle for public participation and articulation and influencing of the trajectory of development planning in local government;
- The reasons for dysfunctionalities and functionalities in the WCS are largely a mix of structural, political, social, economic and operational dynamics; and
- The functionality of ward committees is often weak and varied, and largely depends on contexts and agency of ward committees and ward committee members.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study on the experiences of members of ward committees of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation is significant for two reasons, namely:

Firstly, the findings of such a study have potential to pave a way in which the WCS could be strengthened to enable ward committees to give effect to their mandate as a vehicle for public participation. Public participation is a feature of developmental local government and, as such, public participation is about democratising development, and ensuring that local people can contribute to the resolution of their development problems. That is, the study is an attempt to suggest ways in which the WCS could be positioned if it is to serve as a vehicle for locating development back to the hands of local people.

Secondly, literature on public participation rarely casts public participation as having a political dimension; public participation is largely presented as a technical problem that requires technical solutions. This study seeks to trouble these understandings of public participation to contribute to debates on how best to frame, navigate and negotiate the nexus between the

WCS, public participation and development. It is the hope of this study that such a contribution will shift understandings and enhance the possibility of the WCS doing what it was established to do in the first place.

Therefore, the overarching intention is to contribute to efforts to ensure that the WCS serves as a device to locate development needs of communities at the centre the development agendas of municipalities, and that ward committees are not just an action in isomorphism, but that they provide an effective invited space for public participation.

1.7 Research Methodology and Design

Research methodology and design is about making choices and decisions relating to the collection, processing and analysis of data to find answers to the key research questions in a way that is credible and trustworthy (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:29).

In this study, a qualitative research methodology approach was adopted. Such a decision was based on the intention to deploy a methodological framing that could serve as a conduit for producing rich descriptive data (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:29). This was based on the fact that the intention was to generate in-depth understandings of the experiences of ward committee members of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

In-depth focus group discussions were conducted as a method to elicit data from selected ward committee members from the GKM. Focus group discussions involved structured sessions with three groups of participants, each composed of eight (8) participants, where participants were allowed space to share and express their experiences, feelings, attitudes and opinions on a set of given questions about the WCS as a vehicle for public participation (Welman et al., 2007:201).

In addition to in-depth focus group interviews, secondary data sources, in the form of documents, were also consulted. These included municipal policy documents, legislation, and official municipal council minutes and reports. The intention here was to use the documents to triangulate and contextualise the research.

1.8 Definition of Key Concepts

1.8.1 Ward committee system (WCS)

In terms of Part 2 Section 7 of the Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a), the WCS allows for matters of local concern to be dealt with by committees that are established to ensure public participation at ward level. Ward committees, in terms of section 73 of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a), are a function of Category B municipalities with either a collective executive system, or mayoral executive system or plenary executive system combined with a ward system. Therefore, the use of the concept of WCS in this study is to be understood as provided for in the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000) (RSA, 2000), unless otherwise indicated.

1.8.2 Public participation

Public participation involves active and meaningful engagement of communities in issues relating to the development, improvement and/or change that influences their livelihoods (Bryson, 1993:20; Fox & Meyer, 1995:93). A community refers to a heterogeneous group of people or residents within a specific geographic setting with an identifiable social structure, whose members are bound together by some sense of belonging (Van Horen, 1995:9). A community being heterogeneous suggests that there will be different understandings and expectations in respect of public participation in a community. This is to be expected as the way(s) in which public participation is expected to play out will be rooted in interests, which may be competing at times.

From the above, public participation is not a passive process, a legitimation exercise. Rather, it is an agentic process where communities assume a position of influencing, directing and controlling the implementation of development programmes and/or projects, with the intention of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance, or other developmental valuables which they may treasure for the improvement of their own livelihoods.

The concept of public participation will take on varied conceptualisations among different stakeholders and, the way in which public participation is undertaken in different settings and contexts will therefore vary (Theron and Ceasar, 2008:106). The assumption of public participation is thus that communities are likely to benefit more from development if they are empowered to influence and/or articulate the direction and implementation of a community

development project (Paul, 1987:2). This line of thinking locates public participation as an integral aspect of effective and accountable local governance (Mkhwanazi, 2013: 9). However, this also suggests that one size does not fit all in public participation. Thus, for public participation to rise above just being a term or a concept, it must come in different sizes, and become an experience of meaningful engagement for communities.

As could be deciphered from the above, this study adopts an understanding of public participation that is rooted in the political rather than technical configurations. The understanding in this study is that public participation is about interests, power and control, and that the form public participation eventually takes will largely depend on the nexus of these issues. Therefore, public participation is an exercise that must lead to the meaningful engagement of communities about their development needs, and the invited spaces that are created must subscribe to development as engagement.

1.8.3 Local government

There are three spheres of government in South Africa, namely, national, provincial and local government, which are “distinctive, interdependent and interrelated” (RSA, 1996: 25). The local sphere of government comprises municipalities. The executive and legislative authority of local government is located in Municipal Council (RSA, 1996: 84). It is a political subdivision with substantial control over affairs at local level, including the collection of revenue for rates and services (Ola, 1984:7).

Local government is a decentralised representative structure or institution of government, imbued with general and specific powers, which is responsible for the governance of a specific geographical area (Heymans and Meyer, 1988:2). A local government is composed of elected representatives (politicians) and appointed officials (i.e. administration), and interacts with the other spheres of government with which it shares responsibilities through a regime of intergovernmental protocols (Mtshweni, 2009:43). The local sphere of government, through the Municipal Council, is responsible for the establishment of ward committees as a means for public participation.

1.8.4 Developmental local government (DLG)

Developmental local government (DLG) derives from the notion of a development state. The White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998b) defines developmental local government (DLG) as one that is driven by an interest to work with communities and groups to realise

socio-economic development. Therefore, a DLG is therefore not hands-off, but intervenes to create invited spaces for communities to participate actively in finding sustainable ways of addressing their development challenges. DLG is therefore development-oriented and people-centred (Schoburg, 2014: 5).

The concept of DLG has often been associated with local economic development. However, this view has attracted criticism, with suggestions that a DLG is much more than a narrow focus of local economic development (Mohale, 2015: 7). This opposition has led to an alternative view that posits that DLG should encompass “all issues that are political, social, economic and environmental which impact on the rights of citizens to development” (Mohale, 2015: 7). Within this view, DLG is interventionist in a scale that is larger than local economic development.

In this study, a DLG is characterised by democratisation of development, empowerment and redistribution of resources; social development and economic growth; and integration and coordination (Mohale, 2015: 3). Also, the view that is taken is that the focus of DLG on local economic development may be useful as a trigger in a country such as South Africa, with high rates of poverty and unemployment, but that it is not sufficient to gives expression to the aspirations and imperatives of a DLG. DLG cannot therefore do without a dedicated focus to local economic development, but DLG cannot claim its status with local economic development as its only focus.

1.8.5 Invited spaces

Internationally, governments have instituted institutional reforms, with the aim of opening spaces and inviting citizens to participate in directing, influencing and controlling the delivery of public services (Aiyar, 2010: 204 - 229). Invited spaces are spaces where citizens are invited to become part of how their areas are being governed. Often, within these spaces, rules of engagement are determined and framed by those who have created these spaces, which suggests that they are opportunities constructed to provide spaces for specific types and forms of participation (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 8). Within this understanding, participation is constructed as a spatial practice, capable of producing and/or circumscribing specific types of spaces to create specific types of possibilities for participation (Cornwall, 2002: 8).

This study adopts a view that spaces, whether invited or invented (which is discussed below), are not constructed in a vacuum; they are created to obliterate and/or overlap with the already

existing spaces. If spaces are constructed, then it follows that spaces are created or constructed to serve specific purposes. If that is so, then spaces will constrain some voices while enabling others.

1.8.6 Invented or claimed spaces

Invented or claimed spaces of participation are created by communities or groups themselves to ensure that their voice is heard and that they could participate in matters that affect them, which power holders may support and/or challenge (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 8). Invented or claimed spaces of participation often require collective effort, with communities or groups united and mobilising around a common cause. However, it is important to note that the creation of one space (for example, a ward committee) inherently impacts on the already existing spaces (for example, civic organisations and traditional authorities).

This study adopts a view that power holders may not create invited spaces for communities to participate in and that they could create invited spaces to serve specific functions, some of which would not be in the interests of communities. Thus, communities may have to invent and/or claim spaces for participation in, for instance, integrated development planning in the context of a municipality. Such a view holds that communities and groups have agency to utilise invited spaces in ways that benefit them and to invent alternative spaces for meaningful public participation.

1.9 Thesis Outline

The study is structured and organised into seven chapters, the content of which is summarised below.

Chapter One sets the tone for the study, provides the background to the study, and outlines and states the problem which instigated the researcher to set out to conduct the study in the first place. The chapter provides synoptic references to the questions that serve as the pillar for this study, objectives that point to where the study seeks to and, as well as provides a glimpse of the methodological and design choices and considerations the researcher made to provide a map for the trajectory taken by the study.

The chapter introduces a discussion that begins to problematise current understandings of the WCS that imply that the WCS ends at the legal and technical (e.g. setting up a ward committee

in order to comply with a law) as evidence that a municipality has done what it is supposed to do in terms opening a space for communities to participate actively in their own development.

Chapter Two provides a theoretical basis or framework by reviewing, discussing and analysing literature relating to DLG. The argument raised is that DLG, being interventionist, must democratise development by opening invited spaces for communities and groups to participate meaningfully in integrated development planning processes.

Chapter Three provides a theoretical foundation, lens, or framework by reviewing, discussing and analysing literature relating to public participation and DLG. The substance of the chapter is that there is a need for a conceptualisation of public participation that incorporates political dimensions or aspects of the concept. This means that, within DLG, public participation must be understood as an opportunity that requires an understanding of how interests, power and control work to define and construct types of invited and/or invented spaces created for public participation.

Chapter Four provides a theoretical basis or framework by reviewing, discussing and analysing literature relating to the WCS. The argument raised in this chapter is that if DLG thrives on public participation, then local government must take seriously the positioning of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation. This suggests that if the WCS must ensure that public participation does not serve itself, ward committees must be protected from capture from political parties and the municipality.

Chapter Five departs from the assumption and position that posits that methodological and design choices are key to the credibility and trustworthiness of the claims and conclusions a researcher is likely to make based on the findings. The chapter constitutes an exposition of and rationale for these choices and considerations, and acknowledges that the choices and considerations made in relation to research methodology, design, the research tools are not neutral, but that they are a deliberate attempt to take a specific route at the expense of all others.

Furthermore, the chapter embraces the necessity for all research to observe ethical conventions, with the understanding that researchers must take account of the fact that power produces and controls epistemology, and therefore that ethical safeguards are required in every research endeavour. The chapter further acknowledges and embraces the fact that no matter how a research plan and process is constructed, it is likely to be susceptible to

limitations, whether inborn and/or human-made. The chapter therefore presents mechanisms that were deployed to mitigate the effects of these limitations.

Chapter Six provides a presentation, description and analysis of the key findings of the study. To do this, the chapter provides a sense of what the findings are and what they mean for the WCS as a vehicle for public participation. The chapter is thus an attempt to trouble and problematise the current understandings of the nexus between the WCS, local government and public participation. The chapter uses the key research questions as foundational pillars of the presentation, description and analysis.

Chapter Seven provides overarching remarks based on the key findings of the study. The chapter does this by providing a synopsis of the key findings, and pulling these together to craft key conclusions regarding the WCS as a vehicle for public participation. The chapter concludes by highlighting limitations experienced before and during the research process, and outlines possible areas that could be pursued for further research regarding the ward committee system as a vehicle for public participation.

1.10 Summary

The question of the establishment of a WCS is a legal requirement for municipalities in South Africa. The rationale for the establishment of ward committees is to create an invited space for communities and groups to participate actively in integrated development planning processes at local government level, so that their development needs are properly articulated in the integrated development plans of municipalities. However, as it is argued in this chapter, there is a need to go beyond the legalistic and technical requirements and to delve into what happens once the legal requirement has been met, and begin to ask questions as to whether the WCS in its current form is a sufficient scaffolding device for communities to articulate, influence, direct and control the trajectory of their own development.

This chapter therefore provided a background to the study, and presented the problem in which the study is rooted. In this chapter, the researcher referred to the key research questions, objectives of the study, as well as methodological and design considerations with regards to the conduct of the study. The propositions investigated were also outlined, and the significance and rationale for the study was discussed.

The next chapter provides a review of literature relating to DLG.

CHAPTER 2

DECONSTRUCTING THE NOTION OF DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter provided an overview of the study by highlighting background information, aims and objectives of the study. This chapter aims to deconstruct the notion of DLG, and its deployment as a lever for the transformation of the local government space as a mechanism for bringing communities back to the fold, and ensuring that local government does development with people, by working with local communities to find solutions to respond to their needs, be they social, economic and material needs, to improve the quality of their lives (De Visser, 2009: 9).

The chapter starts by providing an historical overview of the development of local government in South Africa. The chapter also discusses transformation in the local government policy environment and the transition leading to the conceptualisation of local government as DLG in South Africa.

2.2 The History of Local Government in South Africa

The notion of local government is a widely-used concept, with varied understandings and meanings in different settings, and in how it is applied as a lever to improve the lives of people through the provision of public goods and services (Binza, 2010: 242). In South Africa, the re-demarcation of municipalities saw the country entering a third generation of change, which required municipalities to maintain high standards as envisioned by the “developmental local government paradigm” (Atkinson, 2002:2). Many municipalities have, however, encountered challenges in their efforts to live up to this development mandate.

Although significant progress has been made in the sphere of local government in South Africa, an aftertaste of the challenges from the apartheid era remain. For instance, the level and substance of public participation remains largely isomorphic and does not lead to any effective participation of communities in influencing the trajectory of development at local government level. In other words, there are still challenges in effectively replacing the template of development inherited from apartheid era with a new order, where public participation can transform the everyday aspects of doing development at local government level (Robinson,

2008:27). However, before getting into the specifics of the current model of local government, it is important to provide a snapshot into the history of local government in South Africa.

South Africa became a union in 1910, following the South African Act of 1909 (RSA, 1909), which resulted in a three-tier government system (Cameron, 1999:75). The union gave birth to the division of the country into provinces. This model of government made local government a responsibility of provinces (De Visser, 2006:57). However, there was no uniformity in how the sphere of local government was configured, and this resulted in different local government configurations in different provinces in line with the requirements of the apartheid policy of development (De Visser, 2009: 8; Tsatsire et al., 2009: 132).

The responsibilities of local government were severely restricted as development was racially conceptualised and practised. For instance, areas that had a potential to generate their own revenue were reserved for whites, while areas that were poor were allocated for black people (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 132). Therefore, local government at the time functioned as an extension of apartheid conceptualisations and practices of development and local government. To advance this inequitable system of development, powers of the central government were de-concentrated through centrally-controlled regional offices (Tapscott, 2006:3). The intention was to constrain ways in which local government could unfold across the country, and align it with the racially-based configurations of development.

The decision to de-concentrate government served as a mechanism to silence the voice of the grassroots and constructed local government as an instrument for delivering services in a manner that was inequitable and biased to the white population. Given the fact that there was no constitutional safeguard for public participation, every effort was made to shut down spaces for any potential participation of communities and groups in matters of their own development. Local government practically held no powers to manage their own development, as their authority was compromised and the fragmented model of government rendered coordinated local government planning virtually impossible (Tapscott, 2006:3).

Within this model of local governance, public participation in local decision making processes was non-existent. Doing development within this period was thus framed along the lines of separate development and development for them without them. That is, local government became a mechanism for cultural and racial segregation rather than a vehicle for the delivery of services (Tsatsire, et. al, 2009: 133). This had severe consequences for development patterns, with racially determined differential delivery models. In other words, this provided a fertile ground for an inequitable configuration of local government, which would direct

resources and opportunities to specific sections of the population, while rendering these out of reach for the majority of citizens.

The machinery for exploitation and disenfranchisement of most the country's citizens extended to parliament, where racially-based unequal chambers for whites, Indians and coloureds were established (Cameron, 1999:78). The policy of separate development required that communities be racially classified and that separate structures of local governance be established, namely, white local authorities for whites, management committees for coloureds, local affairs committees for Indians and black local authorities for blacks (Tsatsire et. al, 2009: 134). In practical terms, this means that although these racial groups appeared to be enjoying a privileged position in terms of decision making powers regarding general affairs, the white chamber enjoyed an exclusively privileged position of overall control over issues (Cameron, 1999:78).

The Black (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 provided for segregated development in urban areas. In terms of this Act, black advisory committees were established, and their function was to advise white local authorities responsible for administering townships, which were areas designated for occupation (RSA, 1923). Given the fact that black advisory committees did not have any policy making powers, this suggests that African people did not have any authority over their affairs relating to issues of local government, and that all decisions relating to development for black people were taken by white local authorities (RSA, 1923). In this case, development for black people was framed as development for black people without black people.

Black advisory committees included the Black Advisory Boards, Urban Bantu Councils and community councils (Cameron, 1999:77). These were intentionally defective mechanisms which did not serve to address development needs of black people as they largely served as extension of the machinery that denied black people political and socio-economic rights (Cameron, 1999:76). The government-imposed Black Local Authorities (BLAs) were isomorphic instruments created to maintain the status quo rather than bring about any substantive transformation for black communities (Andrews, 2013: 69), as they (the BLAs) had no appropriate revenue base and were therefore structures without the requisite capacity to respond to the development needs of black people (Koma, 2012: 106). This suggests that local government was used as a political instrument to disenfranchise and marginalise black people rather than a mechanism to drive programmes to address people's development needs. In addition, no development could be planned for black people in urban areas as black people were regarded as "temporary visitors" in these areas, which allowed government space

not to provide any long-term settlement programmes for African people (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 134).

This configuration of local government, which starved settlement areas for black people of development, provoked a pushback from communities who were subsequently deprived of development, resulting in widespread protests due to dissatisfaction about increased rentals and disenfranchisement by the apartheid government (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 136). Black communities were opposed to solutions framed from places from which they were excluded, and therefore demanded an overhaul of the structures and processes that excluded them, and called for inclusive systems and processes where they would participate in formulating solutions to their problems (Swilling, 1988: 193).

In response to these pushbacks, the apartheid government imposed local government policies that resulted in the formation of structures such as the Indian and Coloured Management Committees, as well as the BLAs (Ismail, 1996:1), which were by their very design not intended to advance development in these areas. For instance, communities for whom these structures were established were not consulted to ensure that these strategies were appropriate for addressing development needs (Ceasar, 1999:14). In this way, the sphere of local government became a field where apartheid values manifested most visibly, setting it up as a site of the struggle for liberation (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 133). It is not surprising that the first signs of the weakening of the apartheid system as a system of governance becoming an untenable crisis, manifested largely at the level of local government.

2.3 Transforming Local Government in South Africa

The year 1993 marked the end of the apartheid era, at least formally, and the end of term for a regime that disregarded the development needs of most South Africans. However, although the configuration of the local government structure was placed among the top issues for the democratic government, this process was marred by a catalogue of challenges, which made it difficult to construct an alternative form of local government. For instance, the process of negotiation on the issue of local government was largely uncoordinated and disjointed, making it difficult to reach any substantive consensus. The source of this could be attributed to the fact that communities had vested interest in the process of reconfiguring local government, and that this made it a highly-contested area, in which the process of converging views, which were sometimes mutually exclusive, was difficult and challenging (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 140). A further reason for such difficulty could be attributed to the issue raised above, that the

apartheid government used local government as a political ground to entrench racially discriminatory laws, which was largely carried out through unequal access to basic services.

It should be remembered that the negotiations for a democratic government started largely because of pressure that was exerted by civic organisations (in the absence of liberation movements which were banned at the time), forcing the apartheid government to enter negotiations for a democratic South Africa. Although the process was difficult, it led to the formation of the Local Government Negotiating Forum, which paved the way towards the first attempts at establishing a democratic local government in South Africa (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 140).

A new Constitution was negotiated amongst participating parties in 1992 and 1993, culminating in the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1995 (Cameron, 1999:83). The Interim Constitution stipulated power sharing provisions that gave rise to the formation of the Government of National Unity. The establishment of the Local Government Negotiation Forum (LGNF) in 1993 (De Visser, 2006:60), marked a breakthrough in the history of local government in South Africa, as the forum involved national debates concerning the structure and functions of the transition procedures to the new local government (RSA, 1998a: 3). The forum opened the gates for a comparatively peaceful transformation to a new democratic local government (Ceasar, 1999: 20). The result of the negotiations on the form that the new configuration of local government would take gave birth to the establishment of transitional local councils, which were divided into three phases between 1993 and 1999, namely, the pre-interim, interim and final stages of the restructuring of local government (Tsatsire et al., 2009: 141).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) constituted another breakthrough as it provided for the different tiers of government, guaranteeing separation of powers and the exercise of exclusive powers and performance of functions without interference from other spheres of government (RSA, 1996: 25-26). This constitutional provision opened space for the sphere of local government to exercise their mandate without interference. Chapter 7 of the Constitution (1996) provides for the conceptualisation of a democratic local government, which has a development focus, and is accountable to the people it serves (RSA, 1996: 84-85). These two sections of the Constitution (1996) make a constitutional promise for development that is driven by the people for the benefit of the people. It is a commitment that a local government will encourage participation of communities in the matters of local government, and not just be content in doing it for communities. Such a view constitutes a radical shift away from local government as conceptualised during the apartheid era.

The trajectory of transformation characterised in the above carries with it substantive implications for the status and role of local government in giving effect to and actualising its social contract with citizens. In terms of this conceptualisation, local government must transform itself to give effect to new responsibilities and possibilities; ensure that citizens participate in conceptualising, planning and doing development; and ensure that the project of community development is managed in an accountable manner to ensure that its impact on the lives of citizens is sustainable and developmental (RSA, 1996: 84-85).

2.4 Developmental Local Government in South Africa

The demise of apartheid and the formal replacement of the racially-based form of local government placed the challenge to transform the dream for a better life for all at the centre of the work of municipalities, particularly those that were serving poor sections of South Africa (Koma, 2012: 108). This was a challenge in the sense that whatever local government set out to do in these areas, had to be seen and felt to obliterate any semblance of the apartheid past from the reality of the lives of people – that is, communities expected local government to deliver on their end of the social contract, which was to eliminate all forms of physical, social and economic discrimination and replace them with equitable distribution of developmental benefits.

Municipalities that were born then, who largely had inexperienced political leadership and officials, and experienced high turnover of technical staff due to, inter alia, fears about what transformation would hold, faced a mountain of challenges to overcome inequities in the provision of basic services (Koma, 2012: 108). The challenges of transformation that could not be anticipated began to threaten local government as a gateway for reconstruction and development. These challenges combined to create a “toxic mix” (Lancaster & Kirkaldy, 2010: 1) that continue to stand in the way of developmental governance up to this day.

Before considering the challenges of transformation in local government, it is important to indicate that South Africa opted for a form of local government that has a development focus. The following section deconstructs the principle of DLG, and how this informs the lens through which the experiences of ward committee members are to be understood within the context of this study. In other words, this section locates local governance within the broader discourse of development.

The Constitution (1996) requires local government to be not only democratic but to have a developmental focus (RSA, 1996: 84-85). A local government with a developmental focus

could be described as a form of local government that is driven by the need to improve the quality of life of all citizens, socially, economically and materially; functions in a manner which maximises its impact on social development and economic growth; utilises development in order to advance the democracy project; builds human capital through providing community leadership and vision; identifies and/or creates opportunities for and promotes local economic development; and has effective programmes in place to ensure that marginalised and excluded groups within the community are moved to the mainstream of the economy (RSA, 1998b: 8 - 9).

The above definition underscores the developmental dimension of local government as residing at the core of the constitutional obligation of local government. This suggests that the understanding and practice of local government in the new South Africa required a radical conception of local government as a vehicle for reconstruction and development. This shift in conceptualisation suggested that there should be a new set of expectations and possibilities, and that local government in the democratic South Africa would then have been able to stand the test of time only if it met these expectations.

A DLG is expected to enhance and contribute to the betterment of the socio-economic situation of communities, by ensuring delivery of basic services to all citizens, encouraging communities to participate actively in the planning and decision making processes relating to development programmes and projects in their areas, introduce and lead local economic development (LED) activities and ensure effective deployment of available resources to the improvement of the quality of life of communities. The view taken in a DLG is that a strong local government must be able to improve delivery of basic services, which would contribute to a better life for all. What is at stake in DLG is the need to generate development opportunities that are accessible to communities, and which are influenced, directed and controlled by communities. From the perspective of the WCS, this suggests that municipalities must ensure the active participation of ward committees for authentic community participation.

Koma (2012: 109) posits that the main feature of DLG is its bias towards LED. In other words, a DLG must have capacity to mobilise resources and communities to build collective interest in taking advantage of the competitive advantages. LED involves a municipality working in partnership with civic organisations and local business to manage existing resources such that job opportunities are created, leading to the stimulation of the economy of that area. Seen through the lens of DLG, the implication is the release of the potential of the area and the people who live in that area to empower themselves to take advantage of readily available and newly created opportunities to accelerate economic growth and employment (Koma,

2012: 109). This suggests that a DLG, like a developmental state, is interventionist in its approach to development, and instead of blaming the market for its failures, it "leads a strong, concerted drive for economic growth" (Levin, 2009: 944).

The view that DLG must exclusively focus on LED has attracted criticism from those that believe that such a view of DLG is narrow, and subsequently fails to capture the complexity of DLG. The alternative view provided has been that DLG must incorporate "all issues that are political, social, economic and environmental which impact on the right of citizens to development" (Mohale, 2015: 7). In other words, as much as DLG is responsible for LED and delivery of basic services, its mandate goes beyond these two aspects.

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) pointed out that there seems to be a misunderstanding as to what constitutes DLG (SALGA, 1998: 54). For SALGA (1998), being developmental implies the need for municipal authorities to dedicate a biased focus on the socio-economic development of communities. Implicit in this conceptualisation is the need to focus on the impact of service delivery on the quality of lives of people in communities, and not necessarily on the mere delivery of basic services. The implication is that a DLG would adopt a corporate development strategy that is more than a collection of service delivery objectives or individual functions in that it is clear in its interventionist approach how it intends to interact with and manipulate the external environment to generate the impact that it desires in the communities that it serves (SALGA, 1998: 54).

The conceptualisation of DLG adopted by SALGA (1998) points to the importance of local government as a vehicle to improve the quality of people's lives, and ensure that communities are primary participants in driving activities and programmes that seek to find sustainable ways of meeting their material, social, and economic needs. The role of DLG within this context is to identify opportunities and utilise available resources to ensure equitable delivery of basic service to citizens.

The previous political dispensation did not address the development needs of all the people of South Africa. Hence, it therefore became incumbent of the democratic government to improve the quality of life of all the people of South Africa, and to reverse the losses caused by the apartheid past. Part of the puzzle for the democratic government was to foreground public participation as a tool to create invited spaces for communities to articulate and influence the development agenda in their own areas (SALGA, 1998, 54; Binza, 2010: 241)

The principle of DLG suggests the necessity for making change that is sustainable to the lives of communities. The following section discusses the notion of sustainable development as an aspect of DLG.

2.5 Sustainable development and developmental local government

The United Nations (1992:7) describes development as a process whose intention is to satisfy basic needs of people, with the intention of improving the quality of their lives, through the improvement of access to such things as employment, human settlement, education, water, health care, recreation and housing for the betterment of power, economic and social relations. Development is a process of directed change, with clear objectives and means of achieving such objectives (Lélé, 1991: 609).

The Municipal Systems Act (2000: 14) understands development as sustainable development, whose goal is to improve the quality of life, particularly for the poor and marginalised sections of a municipality, and to ensure that development must serve both present and future generations (RSA, 2000: 14). This definition of development, as much as it is happening now, has a future focus, and is about ensuring that development is capable of leading to a future that is better than and/or at least well off as the present (Daly, 2002: 1). It is development that is not obsessed with the present (and wants to finish everything now), but a development that projects to the needs of the people in the future. Such development must be people-centred and capable of leading to self-reliant development (Lélé, 1991: 611).

There is an implicit understanding that sustainable development must be development that can meet the needs of today's generations without undermining and/or jeopardising opportunities for future generations to meet their own needs (World Bank, 2003:20). From the point of view of DLG, sustainable development suggests commitment to putting in place mechanisms and systems to finding sustainable ways of meeting the country's local needs. That is, a DLG takes serious account of the nexus and interdependence of economic growth, social equity and ecological or environmental integrity (Essop, 2005:2).

Sustainability is a key component of development, as it involves a process of comprehensive benefit-cost analysis for an improved quality of life (Binza, 2010:249). It is about weighing up options and deciding on the most relevant way to respond to the needs of people. Viewed through the lens of DLG, it is a clear that a DLG must set out to reduce and arrest unsustainable patterns or trajectories of development. This suggests that for a DLG to work towards sustainable development, it must ensure that there are clear mechanisms to ensure

that communities are part of the development process, and has reasonable understanding and take ownership of the agenda for sustainable development. In addition, if local government work with communities, it is likely to be easier to identify indigenous knowledge systems of how communities have always resolved their development challenges. In this case, development is about building on local social capital that have a promise to sustain communities into the future.

The discussion above suggests that the sustainability of development sits at the core of DLG. Therefore, there is a need for an understanding and willingness to see things into the future, and to realise that what local government does today has implications for the future of communities in their area of jurisdiction, and sometimes beyond it. If DLG is interventionist, then it has a duty to ensure that development trajectories followed are those that are, as far as possible, capable of progressing without threatening and/or causing damage to the opportunities for growth of future generations.

2.6 Local economic development as a key lever of developmental local government

As an element of sustainable development, LED is defined as a process whereby a public institution such as a local government works in partnership with non-governmental and business sector to create conditions for economic growth and sustainable job creation (World Bank, 2003: 1). This is at the crux of the work of DLG.

Twenty first century developmental local government views and utilises LED as a key device to establish a basket of economic opportunities to build the capacity of communities to improve and sustain the quality of their lives. DLG focuses its activities on the improvement of the economic future of communities through activities that stimulate local employment opportunities through undertaking collaborative, strategically planned practices that focus local government on recognising and acting upon its strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats (Binza, 2010: 251).

Creation and/or identification and utilisation of LED opportunities is not without challenges. It could be marred by a catalogue of challenges, including municipal leaders who have inadequate understanding of local government issues and LED to be specific; excessive bureaucratic hurdles; inappropriate politicisation of development issues and unstable political climate; shortage of qualified people who have knowledge and expertise of generating and deploying local solutions to address service delivery challenges (Binza, 2010: 251; City of

Elim, 2005: 2; Blakley, 1994: 83). The challenges enumerated here also apply to the South African local government context. Thinking about LED in South Africa must include ways of dealing with these challenges.

LED requires collaboration with key development stakeholders, that is, municipalities may not be able to successfully go it alone. For instance, an effective LED framework may need to include universities and other human resource agencies, who would assist the municipality to develop human capital that can improve performance and improve economic growth (Binza, 2010: 251-253). Both internal and external institutions have a crucial role in ensuring the success of LED programmes. It is the efficient blending and orchestration of the interplay between the internal and external environment that often leads to productive LED.

It should be remembered that the intention of LED is not for it to exist for its own sake, but for it to exist for the sake of the needs of communities for which it has a responsibility to service. This therefore suggests that a DLG that sets to follow a successful LED trajectory must place at the centre of its existence the importance of active participation for beneficiaries of its local economic development programmes. That is, LED opportunities must align with the needs of local people, and for that to happen, there must be sufficient invited spaces for communities to articulate their needs and influence processes for addressing these needs. This thinking is based on the belief that the success of LED programmes is tied to collaboration, co-produced planning partnerships and common understanding of development issues between the municipality and local people (Binza, 2010: 255).

The 21st century DLG's LED agenda must therefore be people-centred; open to experimentation and learning; empowering and can release potential for growth; and assist local government to become self-sufficient rather than perpetually depending on revenue sources from the national and provincial spheres of government and other aid agencies (Binza, 2010: 249). This in turn suggests that a DLG that pursues a LED agenda empowers its citizens to provide for themselves rather than trap them in cycles of perpetual dependence (Binza, 2010: 249).

LED programmes will work better where when it allows communities to participate meaningfully in the following: developing a description of the community; participation in the analysis of community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; processes to align plans with community values and indigenous knowledge systems; community participation in assessing progress; and collectively plotting actions plans with clear key priority areas and strategic goals (Binza, 2010: 255).

The above assertion underlines the fact that collaboration and co – produced planning partnerships between local government and communities is a key subset for improving and sustaining local economic growth. Therefore, local government remains a key arena for the democratisation of development and active participation of citizens. This view speaks directly to the importance of allowing invited spaces for communities to participate in initiating and directing their own development. There are sound reasons for why this is good for development and governance, namely, participation assists government in addressing basic needs of communities; increases a sense of ownership of community development projects and improves self-confidence and thereby erodes chances for perpetual dependence on external providers; allows active participation of different stakeholders in the alleviation of poverty; provides a mechanism for promoting good governance at local level; and increases transparency and accountability in development projects at grassroots level (Nyalunga, 2006:79).

From the above, LED, as a lever of DLG, elevates public participation and collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders as a key condition for efforts to improve the quality of life of people. Therefore, a DLG has a duty to ensure that LED programmes are situated at the heart of what constitutes development for communities. However, this is not say that local government must sit back, but that DLG plays an interventionist role without closing or suffocating spaces for community participation and influence, direction, control, and ownership at grassroots. In addition, there must be understanding that the focus of local government must not be confined to LED, but that it must realise that its mandate goes beyond it, to the political, social and environmental (Mohale, 2015:7).

2.7 Features of a Developmental Local Government

The White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998b: 38) elevates the following as features or characteristics of a developmental local government:

2.7.1 Democratising development, empowering people and redistributing resources

Democratisation is about creating invited spaces for people to be represented and heard in matters of government; it is more than holding regular elections, and is rather about ensuring that democratisation delivers to the people, in the form of access to basic socio-economic services (Bam, 2015:43-65; Mchunu et al. in Theron & Mchunu, 2016:164). For this to happen, invited spaces must be created for people to participate and engage actively in development

processes and governance thereof. The *Municipal Structures Act* (RSA, 1998a: 45-54) institutionalizes public participation in governance systems and processes through the establishment of representative ward committees. Ward communities must serve as a communication or link between a municipality and the community that it serves. Therefore, an inherent duty is being placed upon the municipality to encourage, invite and ensure effective public participation in matters of community development, because local government does not exist for its own sake, but to serve the needs of the people.

2.7.2 Decentralisation of development

Mchunu et al. in Theron and Mchunu (2016: 165 - 167) contend that decentralisation should allow for people-centred approaches to development, and elevate the need for moving away from the government's centralized governance systems to more grassroots-centric approaches, capable of encouraging and ensuring democratisation through the establishment of deliberate platforms. Decentralisation provides a device for local government to establish and promote conditions for the actualisation of the democratisation promise (Cornwall, 2008: 269) while at the same time improving good and accountable governance and communication.

2.7.3 Maximizing social development and economic growth

Local government should direct its energies towards facilitating social and economic development within communities (Mchunu et al. in Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 165, 168 & 169). This suggests that municipalities have a responsibility to mobilise available resources and seek out required resources to actively initiate and guide LED programmes. This points to the need for municipalities to regulate and stabilise the policy environment to ensure that conditions are conducive to efforts of ensuring poverty alleviation and reduction of underdevelopment through viable public-private partnerships and employment creation opportunities. The focus of any development-focused local government should be the empowering of citizens with appropriate knowledge and skills to participate fully in the mainstream of the local economic and other landscapes.

This will not happen without challenges, some of which Koma and Kuye (2014: 95) highlights poor synchronisation of Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and LED policy framework; fragmented and silorised development planning with regards to IDP and LED priorities; and deficiency of skills necessary for the implementation of LED programmes and activities.

2.7.4 Integrating and coordinating development planning

The coordination and integration of all spheres of government is necessary for DLG. At local government level, IDP is crucial for coordination and integration of social and economic development programmes. A DLG should thus ensure that coordinating processes and systems are in place to regulate and drive development. Besides taking the active role for integrating and coordinating, a DLG must also work in partnership with other sector departments and stakeholders (RSA, 1998b, in Theron & Mchunu, 2016:171) to ensure that the process of development is properly streamlined. Poor coordination and fragmented functioning has a potential to undermine and compromise development efforts. That is, if municipalities lack support from provincial governments, there is likely to be lack of functional clarity and direction in terms of which sphere is responsible for what, undermining the prospects of executing the mandate of a DLG.

2.7.5 Leading and learning

Local government operates in a continually transforming environment. This calls for the need for local government to be open to experimentation and learning to become innovative in its pursuit of its development agenda. This means that local government must be visionary and strategic in its operations as the leader of community development, and that it must position community development structures, such as ward committees, in a locus that links them back to the reason for its existence.

DLG must pursue an agenda for radical transformation, which would make it possible to explore new governance regimes and avenues and discard those that have become obsolete (Mchunu et al. in Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 165 -167). To reach this point, a DLG must ensure that people at grassroots are part of the business of doing development, and that they are co-producers, co-implementers and co-evaluators of development projects or programmes that are meant to improve the quality and resilience of their lives (Mchunu et al. in Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 165 -167).

Mchunu et al. in Theron and Mchunu (2016: 151) have highlighted the ways in which local government could encourage good governance through democratic participation of citizens. These include the fact that grassroots beneficiaries should meaningfully participate in their own development; local government should be responsive, credible and trustworthy among the citizens; local government must have a highly competent and skilled human resource base which can deliver good quality services; the quality and quantity of services should be

increased but must at the same time be cost-effective; and there must be a supportive and encouraging intergovernmental relations environment.

Research reveals that the capacity of municipalities to fulfil the mandate of DLG has been suspect. Various variables account for the inability of municipalities to perform at the expected level, and could include the following: public officials that abandon pursuance of the mandate and engage in corrupt activities; incompetencies on the part of the officials; neo-liberal growth path and commercialization of service delivery; and a poor intergovernmental relations environment (Mchunu et al., cited in Theron & Mchunu, 2016:151).

Considering the above, it is important to indicate that progress in DLG in South Africa has been a mixed basket of success and failure. It is safe to say that the government has made significant progress in terms of achieving the developmental local government vision, despite the challenges that occupy this sphere of government (World Bank, 2011: 1, in Theron & Mchunu, 2016:151).

2.8 The IDP as a Key Developmental Local Government Tool

Active citizenship is characterised by the participation of grassroots beneficiaries in processes of designing, implementing and evaluating service delivery, and development mechanisms to improve the livelihoods of communities. Active participation of ordinary citizens in issues that relate to the improvement of their lives has a potential to increase their ability to “influence, direct, control and own their service delivery and decision-making processes” (Mchunu et al., in Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 173).

The IDP process is a way of “putting development back in the hands of its beneficiaries”, the citizens. This happens when ordinary people are encouraged and enabled to actively and meaningfully participate in IDP processes through recognised (formal and informal) structures (such as ward committees). Failure of local government to integrate citizens in these processes has a potential to reverse gains and lead to dissatisfaction and reputational risk for municipalities. Thus, given the fact that DLG advocates for a people-centred approach to development, IDP provides the glue that holds DLG to its contract to citizens (Mchunu & Theron, 2013: 107).

2.9 Public Participation: A Key Aspect of Developmental Local Government

Municipalities which subscribe and adhere to the principles of DLG focus their energies on activities that empower their communities to "influence, direct and own decision-making processes and community-based development" (Theron, 2009: 113). Municipalities whose mandate is developmental and therefore interventionist should embrace the fact that they were voted into office by the public and should therefore hold the voices of communities as their compass for how to go about governing. In confirming the "democratising development, empowering and redistributing" characteristic of local government described above, Reddy (1999:209) contends that the developmental approach to local government entails forming partnerships with citizens, groups and communities to create sustainable development projects whose aim is to meet social, economic and material needs of the people in an integrated manner (Reddy, 1999:210). These approaches include executing municipal powers and functions in ways that enhance the impact on socio-economic development and growth; setting up and operating mechanisms for integrating and coordinating public and private investment; and building human capital by assuming leadership and empowering marginalised groups such as youth, people with disabilities and women.

The question of public participation is engraved in Section 195 (1)(e) of the Constitution (1996), which stipulates that government must respond to people's needs and that communities must be encouraged to participate in policy making processes, including those relating to their own development needs (RSA, 1996: 111). For a DLG, this elevates the need for the participation of citizens in all aspects such as development planning, resource allocation and decisions pertaining to how development is to be conducted.

When ordinary citizens exercise their right to direct and influence development processes, and are then permitted to "own" the delivered development, they in turn tend to trust and respect their local government (i.e. the reputational profile of the municipality is enhanced). Theron (2009:113) contends that a municipality may achieve this by ensuring that citizens are invited and enabled to determine and control the allocation of development resources, and not merely influence the direction of development. Therefore, municipalities must provide invited space for officials to be held accountable for the aspects of development for which they are responsible (i.e. through annual reporting and other ways of ensuring accountable governance, monitoring, evaluation and feedback to communities).

The discussion about DLG highlights the fact that the process remains a challenge for many municipalities, especially those which are poorly resourced. Many municipalities seem to be

struggling to come to terms with their developmental role in social and economic development "through participatory democracy and within a sustainable development paradigm" (Pieterse & van Donk, 2008: 53).

Having discussed issues around DLG, it is important to now turn to the delineation and deconstruction of the WCS in relation to developmental local governance.

2.10 Summary

The shift to DLG in South Africa was a call for local government to take on a people-centred focus in doing development. The change in the conceptualisation of local government requires municipalities to take account of the need to ensure participation citizen in determining and influencing their own development. The process of determining their own development suggests that municipalities must work with communities to find sustainable ways of addressing and meeting their development needs and, in turn, improve the quality of their lives (RSA, 1998b). This view is contrary to what could be termed as "imposed development", where people's development needs are identified by external agencies without any input from the beneficiaries of such development.

What is inherent in the above understanding of development and the role of local government is the democratisation of development, and the creation of invited spaces for marginalised voices to be heard (Aiyar, 2010: 204). When this happens, indigenous solutions for local problems finds prominent expression in how local government goes about doing development. Local government that purports to be developmental would therefore demonstrate such a commitment through its willingness to create invited spaces for citizens to mobilise themselves for empowering participation in the processes of addressing their development needs, and eventually influence the directions taken by their municipalities in driving their development. This suggests a need to navigate the maze of ensuring meaningful and substantive collaboration and co-production between communities and municipalities.

The following chapter deconstructs the notion of public participation and locates it within a framework of DLG. The intention is to trouble and problematise conventional understandings of public participation and suggest alternative constructions of the notion of public participation, particularly within the context of a WCS.

CHAPTER 3

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT LOCAL GOVERNANCE

> The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you (Arnstein 1969: 216)

3.1 Introduction

Internationally, there has been growing interest in finding ways to enhance public participation in matters of governance to realise the democratising promise (Cornwall; 2008:269; Cornwall, 2002: iii). The participation of citizens at various levels of governance in matters that affect their lives has therefore become an essential component of the efforts to democratise development. Participation is the defining feature of DLG as an invited space for communities to participate actively in matters that affect their development needs (Davids, 2005b: 52). This suggests that public participation must lie at the heart of local governance if development at that level is to be developmental, inclusive and people-centred.

The aim of this chapter is to deconstruct the notion of public participation, provide an overview of the legislative framework that governs and guides public participation in South Africa, and highlight the challenges of public participation, conceptually and operationally. The intention is to locate the focus of this study, which is the evaluation of the WCS within the broader landscape of public participation and local government.

3.2 Defining Public Participation

Excellence in local governance is not only judged by the provision of basic services to citizens; it also resides in the ability of local government to preserve the liberties of its citizens by, for instance, creating invited spaces for democratic participation and civic dialogue (Shah and Shah, 2006:46; Aiyar, 2010: 204), with the intention of democratising local governance and ensuring that local governance speaks directly to the needs of those whose lives are affected by such development. Theoretically, development therefore becomes a community-driven process rather than a top-down process driven by officials.

Public participation has been variously conceptualised and defined in different contexts and by different organisations and individuals. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) contends that public participation is premised on the belief that people who are affected by a decision must be allowed space to contribute to what eventually

becomes of that decision, and therefore must participate in the whole process of getting to that decision (IAP2, 2002). Therefore, public participation is a process where those whose lives are affected by a decision are allowed space to actively participate in solving the problem that occupies their lives. In other words, from the point of view of DLG, any development without public participation constitutes development for its own sake, as an end itself rather than as a means, and may not have any substantive value in the lives of those affected. Therefore, such development may be unable to speak to the needs of those for whom development is said to be delivered.

Fundamentals of public participation may include the public's right to information, the right to complain and comment on issues, as well as the right to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes (Smith, 2003:4). Smith (2003:4) conceives public participation as the creation of invited spaces for communities to participate in crafting decisions which affect them, or in which they have an interest. In other terms, public participation is a democratic process that allows citizens to engage, plan and decide, and thereby assume an active role in development planning processes on issues that are of interest to them.

For public participation to work, it must be driven by a set of principles and assumptions. The Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) (2005b:9) asserts that public participation in South Africa is founded on the following assumptions:

- It upholds the principles of good governance and human rights.
- It recognises the basic rights of all citizens to partake in the local governance system.
- It reduces the social distance between the public and elected institutions.
- It acknowledges the natural value of all citizens, investing in their capacity to have a say in governance processes.
- Citizens can participate individually, as interest groups or communities.
- In the South African context, the community comprises a ward with its elected ward committees.
- Ward committees mediate between the electorate and the elected institutions.

Expanding from these assumptions, Siphuma (2009: 26) explains that the effectiveness of the public in public participation processes is dependent on the central values of the process. The purpose of the values is to ensure that public participation is meaningful and achievable. For instance, Siphuma (2009: 26) argues that public participation must be based on the needs of those who are affected by a situation and, during the process of participation, the public must be guaranteed that their contributions will have an influence on decisions. In other words,

public participation must not be used as “means of legitimating already-taken decisions” (Cornwall, 2002: 270). In this case, it becomes “window dressing”.

In addition, the intentionality of the public participation exercise must be considered seriously. This is largely because public participation could be driven by a variety of competing interests. For instance, the intention could be to obtain legitimation, what Arnstein (1969: 217) refers to as participation as tokenism, manipulative participation where decisions that have already been taken are rubber-stamped, that is, are tabled for legitimation (Cornwall, 2008: 270).

The following section provides a discussion of the justifications for public participation.

3.3 Why Public Participation?

Innes and Booher (2004: 422-423) propose five justifications for public participation, namely:

- **Information for decision-makers**: Public participation allows decision-makers access to how people think about their own problems and solutions, and what they think they need.
- **Integration of indigenous knowledge**: Local solutions for local problems is an important part of development and it is critical for ensuring that people can identify their own thinking in the solutions that are provided for their own problems.
- **Justice and fairness**: If decisions are going to affect people’s lives, it is only fair that those people must actively participate in the processes that lead to those decisions. This is particularly important where marginalised sections of society are beneficiaries of development projects, as their needs may be difficult to understand for development providers.
- **Legitimacy**: Public participation is about ensuring legitimacy for public decisions. For instance, if an LED manager reports that “…we held a series of public meetings, and people contributed and are still contributing to what we are doing, and we are experimenting and learning together as a community”, this suggests that the process has been democratic and legitimate.
- **Requirement of law**: Public participation is a process that officials must follow because it is required in law. For instance, section 44(3) of the Municipal Structures Act (RSA, 1998a) provides for the participation of public and community organisations in implementing development at local government level. Therefore, a municipality in South Africa is obliged to set up mechanisms for effective public participation.

From a DLG perspective, effective public participation is viewed as a way of implementing development and should form the substance of all decision-making processes, to improve the value and integrity of decisions (Theron, 2005a:129). That is, municipalities must create invited spaces for citizens to define and suggest solutions to their own problems. It is when this happens, that municipalities may be confident that what they are doing in terms of development speaks directly to the needs of communities. If citizens can participate in framing their own needs, they are in a much better position to hold municipalities accountable for the quantity and quality of service delivery.

In addition, through public participation, municipalities are assured that communities will view decisions as their own because they have been part of crafting them, and therefore if the process fail, they will most likely be prepared to take their fair share of the blame. Public participation sits at the core of good governance and development, because it serves as a means for communities to demonstrate support for what government is doing and contributes to the improvement of the quality of decisions.

It is important to point out that public participation in this study is understood as an active and meaningful process that can encourage constructive dialogue between municipalities and communities (Mchunu et al., in Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 171). That is, public participation is not just about “consultation” (i.e. a process of asking for and listening to the views of local people or groups with the aim of influencing decisions, policies or actions); it is about active and meaningful involvement (i.e. a process in which people actively participate, and during which the council exchanges information with them and seeks their views) and engagement (i.e. an on-going mutually beneficial two-way partnership between the council and stakeholders, where the decision making process is a shared activities between the parties) (London Borough of Islington, 2008: 4). It is about realising that creating invited spaces for participation may not be enough to bring about empowering participation, but that certain mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that invited spaces become/sites of transformation and that they support the transformation of power dynamics in society (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 9).

The following sections review literature on the perspectives on public participation. The intention of the section is to deconstruct the politics of public participation and locate the study within the broader debate of public participation and the WCS.

3.4 Perspectives on Public Participation

Public participation is a “pretty”” concept, with very few, if any, on the side of opposing it. That is, it is a profoundly revered concept or idea that is applauded by almost everyone without question (Arnstein, 1969: 216), a “hurrah word” (White, 1996: 143). This “unanimous acceptance” of public participation may be problematic in that it has potential to oversimplify the issue and close any chance of troubling and problematising it as a political construct that involves interests, power and control. This suggests that an unanimous acceptance of the concept as unproblematic and straightforward may conceal complexities regarding the various significations and configurations it could take, and the various interests it could serve (White, 1996: 143).

Research literature has identified dilemmas in the practice of participatory approaches to development. For instance, literature has drawn a distinction between pseudo- and authentic participation (White et al., 1994:17). Pseudo-participation is participation that is not participation, but that features, but not practises, the characteristics of participation. Within pseudo-participation, people are made to believe that they are driving the process, when all control and decision-making power is in the hands of those who are supposed to facilitate such participation (White et al., 1994: 17). Pseudo-participation is about public participation that is used to legitimate already-taken decisions, with no guarantees that people’s suggestions and concerns will be responded to or taken seriously (Cornwall, 2008: 270; White, 1996: 142). However, on the other hand, authentic participation is defined as a process that understands and engages with the fact that participation is about interests, power and control (Arnstein, 1969: 217) and, therefore, addresses the question of power relations for meaningful participation by beneficiaries (Servaes, 1999: 198). Genuine participation transforms existing social, political and economic structures and relations in the manner that empowers those that have been and continue to be marginalised (Hickey & Mohan, 2005:238).

Public participation must entail authentic participation, rather than serve for the good intentions that administrators and planners would like citizens to believe they possess (Dunn, 1979: 12). Authentic participation takes account of the fact that contexts are heterogeneous and, therefore, require mixed approaches that do not slavishly conform to blueprints or one size fits all approaches, but a context-relevant approach that empowers beneficiaries of development to *influence*, *direct*, *control* and *own* the project in which they are participating (Theron, 2012: 2-3).

The following sub-sections provide perspectives that should be considered in reflecting about public participation.

3.4.1 Interests in public participation

Two streams of thinking are located within the politics of participation, namely, *who* participates and at what *level* of participation. The question of who participates is based on the recognition that communities are heterogenous and that for communities to participate actively and meaningfully, special scaffolding mechanisms need to be in place (White, 1996: 143). The second emanates from the first one, and holds that "involvement" is not enough, and that there is therefore a need to create invited spaces and put in place transformation scaffoldings to ensure that people can participate meaningfully in appropriate and relevant levels of decision making processes (Ibid).

White (1996: 143) contends that these two dimensions are inadequate and do not go far enough to divulge the not-so-obvious issues, which could easily obscure the real issues that reside at the core of the politics of public participation. For instance, creating invited spaces for the and participation of ward committee members in IDP processes (i.e. their physical presence in the processes) might not be enough to bring about meaningful participation in decision-making and having a say and/or being able to represent and articulate accurately the needs of those that they represent (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 9; White, 1996: 143).

For White (1996: 144), the above measures and mechanisms "can only *facilitate* fuller participation" but "they cannot *deliver* it". Authentic participation would only be possible when action is taken to ensure that invited spaces become sites of transformation and support the transformation of power dynamics (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 9). Therefore, the question of what beneficiaries have become included in, on whose terms, and what new exclusions emerge from their inclusion in processes becomes critical. Otherwise, public participation becomes an isomorphic exercise, a "window-dressing" exercise, with no substantive benefits for communities.

The purpose of creating invited spaces for public participation is a function of conflict. The purpose for why invited spaces have been created in the first place therefore has an impact on what is possible within those spaces (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 10). For instance, invited spaces may be created with only very limited room for ward committee members to influence IDP processes. This suggests that ward committees may not have any real influence, control or ownership of the decision-making process as the interest of the municipal council is to use

participation as a means for legitimating already taken decisions, rather than the authentic participation of ward committee members (Cornwall, 2008: 270).

The above suggests that ward committees may have to invent their own spaces and/or find a way to play by the rules (i.e. use invited spaces intelligently), but still can ensure that they serve as transformative spaces rather than as a vehicle for the legitimation of the already taken decisions. This indicates that spaces, such as the WCS, are not immune to existing struggles for control, but that they are embedded within existing power relations (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 10), and that action needs to be taken to ensure that public participation is for the benefit of those who must benefit from it. Otherwise, the WCS is likely to serve simply to reproduce existing social relations rather than serve as an invited space capable of amplifying alternative versions of public participation.

In relationship to the above, invited spaces such as the WCS has potential to make these spaces count in the favour of the communities, but that empowering systems and processes need to be put in place for this to happen. On the other hand, the question of invented spaces and the intelligent utilisation of invited spaces suggest that there is always a space for resistance and agency space (Newbury & Wallace, 2014: 10), and of ensuring that these spaces have a transformative function.

3.4.2 Types of public participation

White (1996: 144-147) distinguishes between four types of public participation, namely, nominal participation, instrumental participation, representative participation and transformative participation. Below is an explanation of each type of participation:

- **Nominal participation**: People are encouraged to form groups the existence of which serves as a symbol that they are indeed “participating”. The interest of development facilitators here is not authentic participation; it is participation for the legitimation of the already taken decisions (Cornwall, 2008: 270). In other words, these groups function as a symbol or display of participation, but there is no authentic participation in any of the processes that matter.
- **Instrumental participation**: This kind of “participation” is when facilitators use people to achieve their own interests. That is, people’s participation comes at a cost; it is not valued for its own sake. People participate because there is something in it for them that they cannot do without. Therefore, people have no option but to participate.
- **Representative participation**: Local people are invited to form their own groups, participate in the development of bylaws and develop plans on what they would do.

The intention is to allow local people to have a voice in and influence governance. Here, participation is used as a device through which people could express their interests, a process which leads to empowerment.

- **Transformative participation**: This type of participation is about authentic empowerment, with people considering options, making decisions and acting collectively. It assumes that outsiders can facilitate participation, but they cannot deliver it – that is, there is an assumption that empowerment must involve action from below. However, this type of participation understands that a situation may exist where outsiders work in solidarity with local people to bring about transformation. In other words, facilitators and communities may be working as a collective, rather than as conflicting groups, to achieve agreed upon goals. This is what collaborative co–production in planning actually entails.

White (1996: 147-148) cautions that public participation is more complex than represented in the types of participation outlined above. For her, this is largely because the tussle of interests is not static – it is in a constant state of flux; it is dynamic – people may decide to spend their time in other things, to which they may have more interest. Therefore, to represent public participation as a phenomenon with dimensions of interests, power and control, White (1996: 147-148) identifies four dynamics of participation, namely:

- **The character of participation is in state of flux**: it changes over time: people prioritise and decide to spend their time on other activities, because their interests have changed. In some cases, people may decide that it is no longer evaluable for them to participate as their participation does not lead to the fulfilment of their interests, or they may have lost confidence that their interests will be met by their participation.
- **Participation is itself a site contest**: The “top-down” and “bottom-up” interests may not always match neatly. For instance, the interests that one group or individual has identified for themselves may not be served by their participation. Different groups or individuals may require participation for different reasons, for example representation versus legitimation. For instance, municipal councillors may be unhappy that empowerment is happening in the ward committee, as this may trump their interests to push the agenda of their political parties. This suggests that participation may not always be in the interests of those who participate, and whether participation is for the interests of those who participate depends on the type of participation, and the terms in which it is presented (White, 1996: 150). When participation no longer meets the interests of those who are participating, the best empowerment strategy could be to terminate participation.

- **The outcomes of participation result in the generation of interests**: Power is implicated in the construction of interests; participation is about "which interests 'win out' against others" (White, 1996: 151). Conflicting interests reflect power relations in society, and the participation process itself shapes the way interests are constructed. For instance, members may participate in the ward committee just because they view such participation as a vehicle to access people in powerful places who could facilitate their employment in the municipality. Thus, their participation may have been encouraged by the absence of alternative options. This suggests that those who have other options will not make themselves available for participation (White, 1996: 152).
- **Interests reflect power relations in society**: Interests in, for instance, development projects, emanate from how power plays out in the wider society. For instance, ward committee members may be local people who are unemployed, and are therefore in the lower rungs of the economic scale in their community. This suggests that these people may not have adequate access to resources, and may be participating because this is how they are awkwardly positioned in their communities. However, when nominated to the ward committee, they may not express their interest of wanting to get closer to people in high places, but that does not mean that they do not have interests; it means that they do not believe that verbalising these interests at that point will lead to them being realised.

It is important to remember that in the first dimension of public participation, which responds to the question of "who", "who" may be (erroneously) constructed as homogenous, whereas "who" is in fact heterogeneous. For instance, if "who" refers to a community in a ward, then it must be understood that the community comprises individuals or groups who may have differing interests. However, when the response to "who participates" results in a heterogeneous mix of individuals or groups, then it is easier to understand that there is a mix of diverse interests and expectations for participation (White, 1996: 148). Therefore, people often check in groups because of the hope of individual and/or group gain (White, 1996: 148). However, there may be other interests and expectations from the outside, which may be heterogeneous.

Thus, there will be politics not only in the form and function of public participation, but also in how public participation gets to be presented at each instance (White, 1996: 148). Therefore, public participation should not be about enabling people to participate, because they have always participated; it should be about ensuring that they participate in the right ways (White, 1996: 154)). This is largely because public participation is a political construct, which may happen for a range of reasons and interests. That is, there are always questions that need to

be answered about who is participating, how, and on whose terms. If this is overlooked, public participation may serve as a means through which existing power relations are entrenched and reproduced rather than a mechanism to challenge patterns of dominance and exclusion.

3.4.3 Principles and core values of participation

The Manila Declaration (1989) asserts that governments must ensure public participation in development processes to enhance sustainable development and a sense of ownership in citizens (Theron, 2009 113). This implies a people-centred approach to development, where people have control and influence over decision making processes. Participation in decision-making processes requires active engagement of all affected people to find solutions to the challenges they have articulated.

The Manila Declaration (1989) identifies three basic principles of people-centred development, namely:

- Sovereignty resides with the people, the real social actors of positive change. Therefore, the role of government is to enable people to set and pursue their own agenda.
- To exercise their sovereignty and assume responsibility for the development of themselves and their communities, people should control their own resources, have access to relevant information, and have the means to hold officials of government accountable.
- Those who would assist people with their development should recognise that it is they who are participating in support of the people's agenda, not the reverse.

According to the Manila Declaration (1989), international and national systems should be transformed to include the redefinition of participation, access to information by citizens, the building of inclusive alliances, reduction of debt dependence and, importantly, reinforcing citizens' capacity to participate in democratic affairs. In that regard, the IAP2 (2002) describes the core values of participation as follows:

- The community should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the community's contribution will influence the decision.
- The public participation process communicates the interest and meets the process needs of all participants.
- The public participation process seeks and facilitates the engagement of those potentially affected.

- The public participation process entails participation in defining how they participate.
- The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful approach.

The role of citizens in the governance of their own affairs can be represented in three substantially differing views (Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 117). First is the new-liberal market approach, which proposes the weakening of the government through privatization and decentralisation. In this view, citizens are regarded as consumers who have the right to choose from the market and as well through “co-provisioning of services at the local level” (Ibid). The second is the liberal representative approach which emphasises the exercising of democratic rights through multi-party electoral processes. The role of citizens in this regard is passive as they only participate through elections and have limited rights and influence. The last is the participatory democracy approach, also known as the “deepening democracy” approach. The approach highlights that democracy entails a set of procedures, institutional design and rules, but participation is more than engaging in the electoral processes.

Despite participation having been popularized, it seems the aspects of decentralisation and participation of citizens in their own development is still far from being achieved (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). At local government level, public participation has not been effectively operationalized, and it has largely not delivered authentic participation where communities are actively engaged in development planning processes (Mogale, 2003: 223).

The following section provides a survey of key legislative and regulatory guidelines. The intention of the section is to provide a legal context within which the WCS is located in South Africa.

3.5 Statutory Framework and Regulatory Requirements for Public Participation

The rationale for the existence of the legislative framework regarding public participation is to ensure that those in authority establish mechanisms and invited spaces for citizens to participate in decision making processes. From a local governance perspective, ward committees are a means through which local government creates invited spaces in compliance with its legislative mandate of ensuring public participation (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:25).

3.5.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

The importance of public participation is entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). The Constitution (1996) requires that local government "consults" and/or "involves" members of the public in its processes of decision making, particularly on issues that directly affect them. Therefore, local government has a duty in law to created invited spaces for and promote the participation of communities and community organisations in the matters of local governance (RSA, 1996: Section 152 (1) (e)).

3.5.2 The White Paper on Local Government (1998)

The White Paper on Local Government (1998b) establishes a foundation for a local government system whose primary concern is collaboration with citizens to ensure sustainable solutions for local problems. Siphuma (2009:62) describes the White Paper on Local Government (1998b) as a symbol for the renewal of local government - a point of departure away from conceptualisations of the past. The White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998b) requires that municipalities develop mechanisms and create invited spaces for public participation in areas that affect communities and, inter alia, the work of ward committees.

3.5.3 White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997)

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1997), published on 24 November 1995, sets out eight key pillars of transformation, amongst which Transforming Service Delivery is the key. The importance of transforming the public service lies in the significance of establishing a capable public service, which can meet the service delivery demands of a new society. The purpose of this White Paper is to provide a policy framework and a practical implementation strategy for the transformation of public service. Eight principles for transforming public service delivery, the *Batho Pele* Principles (RSA, 1997: 6), have been identified, namely:

- **Consultation:** Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice on the services that are offered.
- **Service standards:** Citizens should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.
- **Access:** All citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.
- **Courtesy:** Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.

- **Information**: Citizens should be given full and accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.
- **Openness and transparency:** Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.
- **Redress:** If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy; and when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.
- **Value for money**: Public services should be provided economically and efficiently to provide citizens with the best possible value for money.

3.5.4 The Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998)

Section 44(3) of the Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998) provides for the participation of the public and community organisations in local government affairs. Sections 72 to 78 of the Act also provides for the establishment of ward committees and outlines their roles and responsibilities.

3.5.5 The Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000)

Chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000) requires that local government strengthens public participation by establishing mechanisms and processes, and providing invited spaces for information dissemination to the public.

3.5.6 The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (Act No. 56 of 2003)

The purpose of the Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No. 56 of 2003) is to secure sound and sustainable management of the fiscal and financial affairs of municipalities and municipal entities by establishing norms and standards and other requirements for ensuring transparency, accountability and appropriate lines of responsibility; management of municipal revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities and handling of their financial dealings; budgetary and financial planning processes and co-ordination of those processes with the processes of organs of state in other spheres of government; management of borrowing processes; handling of financial problems in municipalities; implementation and management of supply chain management practices; and other financial matters (Republic of South Africa, 2003: 22).

Section 23 of the Act requires that municipal councils must consider views of communities when the annual budget is being tabled.

The above legislation indicates the key responsibilities of municipalities in ensuring that mechanisms, systems and processes of public participation are in place. These responsibilities speak to, inter alia, the duty of municipalities to promote conditions necessary for public participation in local governance to ensure transparency, accountability, authentic participation, representation and responsiveness as essential pillars of good governance and the democratising promise (Davids et al. 2005: 64; Cornwall, 2008: 269).

3.6 Public Participation Mechanisms

Public participation can be conducted in various ways. Below is a brief discussion of some of the most common public participation mechanisms employed by municipalities in South Africa.

3.6.1 Public hearings

Public hearings, also known as imbizos, are pre-arranged meetings between municipal officials and the public (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 10). This is the most common strategy employed by local government authorities when they want to communicate issues to the public. Public hearings are often used as a feedback-gathering strategy in which public officials get to listen to the public's priorities, needs and the challenges they might be facing as a community. For example, local government officials may want to inform about and discuss with the public a proposed community development project. So, the purpose of meetings would be to create an invited space for the municipality to engage with the public and hear their views regarding the proposed community development project.

However, the effectiveness of this public participation mechanism has been under severe criticism because it has been irregular and not formally institutionalised as part of governance processes, but more as a tool for political mobilisation (Mathekga & Buccus, 2007: 11 - 17).

3.6.2 IDP forums

As discussed in Chapter 2, the IDP is a five-year strategic planning tool that guides and informs the municipality's priorities and how resources are to be distributed and utilised within a municipality (Theron, 2005b:135). The IDP sets out the priorities of a particular area and ensures that the municipality is able to attract funding from other spheres of government (Tshabalala, 2006:53). Municipalities are required by law to establish the IDP Representative Forum to provide relevant stakeholders, including ward committees, with the opportunity to represent the interests of their constituencies (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005: 33).

IDP Representative Forums, therefore, provide a structure for discussion, negotiations and joint decision-making between communities and municipalities, and provide an opportunity to monitor the implementation of the key areas of the IDP (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 33).

3.6.3Ward committees

The Office of the Speaker, working with ward councillors, has a duty to ensure the establishment of ward committees. Ward committees are composed of the elected community members of a particular ward and are responsible for:

- raising issues of concern about conditions in their ward to the ward councillor; and
- participating in decision making processes regarding development planning and projects that municipalities undertake which have an impact on the ward.

(Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 5)

The role of ward committee is to increase the participation of residents in municipal decision making, as they are a direct and unique link with the municipal council (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 5).

3.6.4 Public participation standing committees

Public participation standing committees are established to ensure that citizens participate in governance issues. The role of the standing committees is to monitor and oversee the effective execution of public participation strategies. This means that standing committees have powers and functions vested upon them by the Council, meaning that the committee may act on behalf of the Council to provide platforms for the public to participate in issues related to the governance of a municipality (Cornwall, 2002: 9).

3.6.5 Suggestions/complaints register

The purpose of the complaints/suggestions register is to provide a space, usually in a form of a book, for community members and the public who visit offices of municipalities to record their suggestions and/or complaints. Complaint/suggestion registers are often located at the help desks so that anyone who has a suggestion or concern for the attention of the municipality can write it down and place it in the box. If managed properly, the entries in the complaints/suggestions register prompt municipalities to take appropriate remedial action.

It is important to point out that the public participation mechanisms discussed above can only be effective and beneficial to citizens if are implemented in a manner that makes participation authentic for citizens. In some cases, these would work best if they are deployed using an eclectic approach (i.e. use them as a combination that seeks to make public participation effective). In addition, it is the responsibility of municipal officials to ensure that the public has access to the resources needed for them to fully participate in municipal affairs. In other words, public participation platforms provided by municipalities must empower the public to influence, direct and own decision-making processes to ensure effectiveness of public participation (Mchunu, 2012: iii). Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence suggests that the keeping of a suggestion box or register has become a valueless ritual, which does not lead to any substantive public participation.

3.7 Benefits of Public participation

Public participation is a foundation of accountable democratic governance, and a platform for creating opportunities for open exchange of ideas, and informed and representative decision-making processes (Aiyar, 2010: 204). The assumption is that if citizens are part of decision-making processes on issues that affect them, they are likely to embrace and own these decisions, as they can associate with the processes and their outcomes. Public participation therefore legitimises governance processes.

Public participation provides opportunities for citizens to be part of the processes to address their development needs. Being part of these processes presents invited spaces for them to contribute to and influence the trajectory of development processes. During processes of public participation, citizens can participate in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of development programmes. Participation is therefore an essential aspect of social transformation.

South Africa comes from a history where there were no mechanisms or constitutional safeguard for the participation of citizens in the efforts and processes to address their development needs (Williams, 2006: 200). Therefore, the local government space has a potential to provide a platform for ensuring democratic citizenship, inclusive and people-centred governance (Pieterse & van Donk, 2008:3). Public participation presents an opportunity for dialogue on issues of development (ibid). In other words, public participation has potential to improve the quality of decisions taken with regards to the needs of citizens and to ensure that municipalities are at least held accountable for their mandate to the people by strengthening what could be called people-centred democracy (Davids et al. 2005:64).

3.8 Challenges Associated with Public Participation

As pointed out, the concept of public participation has become a catch-phrase across a spectrum of institutions internationally. The unquestioning acceptance of it has however led to participation signifying anything that involves people (Cornwall, 2008: 269). As such, the implementation of public participation has become stuck in a pool of competing significations and referents, leading to challenges with its implementation (Cornwall, 2008: 269).

As argued, participation is a political process which involves interests, control and power (Arnstein, 1969: 217; White, 1991: 143). For instance, people may have no interest in participating because they have little or no confidence that their interests will be met through participation. When this happens, the reputation of the municipality may be at risk and there may be challenges in knowing what it would take to meet the interests of citizens in terms of improving the quality of their lives (Babooa, 2008: 41). For instance, this could lead to the invention of alternative spaces such as service delivery protests, which may blemish the image of a municipality and/or compound problems.

The source of non-participation may not be that the community is unwilling to participate; it may be that there are conflicting interests about the content and terms of public participation. A municipality may be reluctant to create invited spaces for public participation because it may be too risky for them reputationally. Therefore, lack of public participation may be what the municipality prefers in order not to be held accountable for the delivery and/or lack of delivery of basic services. Again, if no invited spaces are created for public participation, citizens may invent their own spaces for public participation and ensure that their voices are heard (Mchunu, 2012; Mchunu & Theron, 2013: 121).

An impediment to public participation is the lack of resources, especially financial (Craythorne, 2006:307). Most municipalities have a weak revenue base because of high rates of poverty and unemployment, and non-payment for services by some citizens. Thus, municipalities may be compelled to cut down on some activities, and public participation may be one of those line items which are pushed to the bottom of the list of priorities. If this happens, there may be challenges in ensuring that the municipality and communities “read from the same script”.

Municipalities may also face a challenge with officials who are incompetent and/or unwilling to be held accountable for the services that they provide to citizens. Some of these officials may have been politically deployed without any skills and knowledge of their work. For instance, in

a study conducted by Tsatsire (2008: 250) on the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, the following findings emerged:

- Municipalities did not understand their roles in terms of DLG.
- There were huge service delivery backlogs and municipalities were unable to address these backlogs.
- There were concerns about South African local government being over-legislated in such a way that a significant proportion of the time of municipalities was spent on compliance.
- There were protests on service delivery, a sign that public participation mechanisms were poor and/or non-existent and there was no regular communication between municipal councils and communities.
- The WCS was dysfunctional and it was difficult to encourage public participation without them.
- Municipalities were not engaging with citizens in line with Batho Pele Principles (1997) of service delivery.
- Municipalities were staffed with too many incompetent officials and it was almost impossible for them to realise their development priorities with these particular officials.

The above findings by Tsatsire (2008: 250) suggest that local government in South Africa continues to struggle with its developmental mandate, which is likely to relegate public participation to the bottom of the list and/or reduce public participation to a toll for legitimation rather than citizen empowerment.

3.9 Summary

The objective of this chapter was to delineate and deconstruct the notion of public participation. The meaning of public participation has been taken for granted owing to its widespread usage. This has led to challenges of conceptualisation, where the concept has tended to signify “anything that brings people together” (Cornwall, 2008: 269). Public participation is supposed to be at the core of DLG in South Africa. DLG therefore has a constitutional duty to create invited spaces for communities and the public to influence, direct, control and own decision making processes to ensure effectiveness of public participation (Mchunu, 2012: iii).

Public participation is a legislated mandate in South Africa. The existence of the legislative framework regarding public participation is to ensure that municipalities establish mechanisms

and invited spaces for citizens to participate in decision making processes. From a local governance perspective, ward committees are a means through which local government creates invited spaces in compliance with its legislative mandate of ensuring public participation (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:25).

The absence of or existence of weak mechanisms for public participation may be regarded as the breach of the democratising promise (Cornwall, 2008: 269). This is based on the understanding that DLG in South Africa is also about democratising development. Various invited spaces have been engraved in law regarding public participation. One of these invited spaces in the WCS, whose intention is to serve as a vehicle for public participation.

The following chapter deconstructs the WCS as a vehicle for meaningful public participation in municipalities.

CHAPTER 4

DECONSTRUCTING THE WARD COMMITTEE SYSTEM AS A VEHICLE FOR MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Introduction

The history of the WCS in South Africa can be traced as far back as 1786 when it was first introduced. The system was born in the Cape because of burghers who wanted a bigger share of representation in the then government of the colony. This resulted in the decision to assign them additional policing and municipal roles (Putu, 2006: 9). Amongst other things, their primary responsibility involved interfacing between their communities and what was then known as municipal commissioners. Years later, the system was discarded, owing to resistance against the system when Africans expressed concerns that the system excluded Africans (Craythorne, 1993:106).

Under the democratic dispensation, local government was organised into municipal wards. This, for the first time in history, granted all eligible South Africans the right to democratically vote for representatives who would administer their local communities (Parnell, et al., 2002:83). Part of the project of transformation in the new South Africa was the need to replace the exclusionary government with an inclusive form of government, where all citizens would be able to participate in framing decisions on matters that directly affect them.

The *White Paper on Local Government* (RSA, 1998b) makes a promise that local government will be radically transformed in line with the spirit of transformation. Flowing from this, measures were introduced to open invited spaces for public participation and to introduce a local government that is committed to working with citizens to find sustainable solutions to their social, economic and material needs and to improve the quality of their lives (RSA, 1998a). This led to South Africa adopting DLG as a local governance framework. As indicated earlier, one of the major principles of DLG is public participation (Ntlemeza, 2007: viii), which led to the establishment of the WCS.

The ward committee system was therefore intended to create and/or expand invited spaces for public participation and to enhance accountable local governance. Therefore, ward committees have become the major vehicle for public participation in municipalities in South Africa, as they constitute a mechanism that government has adopted to introduce a new

meaning to development at local government level. Ward committees have become an institutionalised medium of communication between communities and their municipalities (Bolini & Ndlela, 1998:68).

This chapter profiles the WCS as a vehicle for meaningful public participation in the business of doing development. The chapter does this by deconstructing the WCS as a concept, and locating it within the broader focus of the current study.

4.2 Developmental Local Governance, Public Participation and Ward Committees

DLG should thrive on public participation, because it is about people, and not just about basic services (Ntlemeza, 2007: 22). Therefore, ward committees have been instituted in municipalities across the country and, as provided for in the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a). The primary function of ward committees is the promotion of participatory democracy in local governance. As indicated in the previous chapter, ward committees are citizen advisory structures that must represent interests of communities in municipal IDP processes (Tshabalala, 2007: 4).

However, the very conceptualisation of the ward committee as an advisory structure has become a source of challenge towards meaningful representation of the voices of communities (Ntlemeza, 2007: ix). Ward committees have no formal powers in law to dictate to the council to do anything (Nyalunga, 2006: 46). For instance, in the study conducted by Mkhwanazi (2013: 59) in Mafube Local Municipality in North West province, South Africa, it was revealed that 65 per cent of the participants reported that the municipal council did not consider their input and recommendations. The danger with this attitude (by the municipality) towards ward committees is that it not only violates the constitutional promise and the spirit of local government as developmental, but that it potentially has harmful consequences for public participation, and shuts down any possibility for invited spaces for communities to be heard.

The mandate of the ward committee requires its members not to be politically aligned to any political party, as they must represent interests of communities across the political spectrum (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 5). However, there is evidence to suggest that ward committee members often belong to a political party for which their ward councillor is a member, and often find it difficult to keep political agendas of their political parties out of the work of the ward committee (Thabanchu, 2011: 7). This gives rise to a situation where there is a likelihood that ward committee members would struggle to execute

their responsibilities objectively and may become loyal to the councillor or even do things to protect the integrity of their political party. A situation of “divided loyalties” – where the loyalty of ward committee members is divided between their comrade and the community – is problematic and often difficult to manage. Ward committee members require a level of political immunity to effectively deliberate on matters of the delivery of basic service and represent the interests of their community without the interference of party politics (Thabanchu, 2011: 7).

Another issue is that of reimbursement of ward committee members for operational expenses. This was earlier pushed as a solution to the apathy and inactive engagement of ward committee members (Piper and Deacon, 2008: 43). This resulted in the decision by government to provide a stipend of R1000 for ward committee members. Recently, the WCS has become a terrain of struggle for political control. Instead, of ward committees being about public participation in local governance processes, they seem to have become a source of political contestation and conduits for channelling of resources to comrades (Meijer, 2015; De Lange, 2014; Abrahams, 2016; Nhanha, 2016; Mjekula, 2016; eNCA, 2016; Williams, 2014). The problem with this is that some individuals may become ward committee members for the wrong reasons (for example, to access the stipend and/or to represent the interests of their political parties).

The ward councillor serves as the chairperson of the ward committee (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 5). This suggests that the effectiveness of a ward committee may be tied to the competency and efficiency of the ward councillor. There has been concerns about the effectiveness of ward councillors in many parts of South Africa (Dispatch Live, 2014). In some cases, the effectiveness of ward committees in playing their role in public participation is often hamstrung by municipalities that are unwilling to share the required information with ward committees (Mosotho, 2013: ii). In addition, there is evidence that some ward councillors, in their roles as chairperson of ward committees, have tended to be subjective and bias towards interests of their political parties, instead of representing the needs of their communities. For instance, a ward committee member from Govan Mbeki Municipality reported that “…. the problem is that the ward councillors are not independent … When we come up with creative constructive ideas, you become a threat to them ... When we have elections for ward committee members in our communities, councillors already have the names of the people they want elected [to the ward committee]. This situation makes some ward committee members to become ‘Mickey Mouses’ of these councillors, because they do not contribute, but are told what to do” (SA Local Government Briefing, 2005: 28). This suggests weaknesses in how the Office of the Speaker manages the election of ward

committees in some parts of the country. That is, most of what is understood or called participation is noting rather than empowering participation.

Constrained opportunities for participation of ward committees in local governance processes reduces public participation to more consultation, and citizens are not actively participating in the planning and decision making of the municipality (Mkhwanazi, 2013: 63). For public participation to be effective, municipalities need to be diligent in developing mechanisms and strategies for active public participation (Siphuma, 2009: iv). That is, municipalities need to encourage active public participation rather than "go through the motions" of public participation to legitimate already taken decisions (Cornwall, 2008: 270). Ward committees must represent interests of communities in the identification of potential projects for the improvement of livelihoods in communities. In times of dispute resolution, ward committees can render the necessary support to the municipal council, in as much as they may also inform and update the community about municipal operations.

The above discussion suggests that, although there might have been good intentions behind the decision to establish a WCS, implementation has been marred with challenges. These challenges have often posed a threat to the advancement of public participation, and have sometimes closed invited spaces for active public participation. If people who "participate" in local governance cannot directly influence, direct and control processes that is not participation.

The following section outlines some of the key roles and responsibilities of ward committees, as an attempt to locate these within the context of the current study.

4.3 The Mandate of Ward Committees

The Constitution of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996) places a duty on local government to create invited spaces for public participation to ensure a democratic and accountable local government and encourage the participation of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government. However, there is a huge difference between authentic and empowering public participation and other "mechanisms" which equate involvement and consultation. This difference is however not clearly articulated in South African legislation and academic writing. Local government legislation must make a provision for local authorities to establish a system of participatory democracy at the local level in the form of ward committees (Houston et al., 2001:206).

The following section provides a discussion of the key roles and responsibilities of ward committees.

4.3.1 Ward committees as communication channels

The primary duty of ward committees is to represent interests of communities through effective communication with the municipality on matters of IDP (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 33). This entails ensuring that concerns from communities are heard and taken into consideration when planning development for those communities (RSA, 2000; RSA, 1998a; Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:37). Therefore, for a ward committee to represent the interests of its community without political bias, the process of nomination and election of ward committee members must be addressed objectively (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:5).

Objectivity in the election of ward committee members is also critical in that ward committees must also receive, process and consider concerns and complaints lodged by community members (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:5). This suggests that they may be required to seek answers from ward councillors and their municipality to ensure accountability and efficient delivery of basic services. The effectiveness of ward committees in holding ward councillors accountable is underlined by the fact that some ward councillors may not deliver once they have been elected. For instance, a study conducted in Buffalo City Municipality revealed that some councillors did not avail themselves to the community or were simply “invisible”, so much so that local community members did not even have access to information such as knowing how to go about lodging complaints (Reddy & Sikhakane, 2008:691). If this situation is not addressed, it is likely to compromise the effectiveness of ward committees as a vehicle for public participation and communication between communities and their municipalities.

The above example from Buffalo City Municipality suggests that ward committee members are expected to have reasonable understanding of development planning processes and the associated principles. Without this understanding, ward committee members may be unable to effectively fulfil their role as an effective interface between the community and municipality (Afesis-corplan, 2003: 45).

Research reveals that ward committees, in their role as a communication conduit, also experience challenges. In some cases, meetings are not held or there are insufficient members to constitute a quorum; high turnover of ward committee members, as members

lose interest or relocate for work opportunities; chairpersons (ward councillors) not being available to attend meetings or failing to call meetings; no clear terms of reference for committees, resulting in ad-hoc responses to any matters that arise in the wards; poor working relationships between ward councillors, and the committees, with ward councillors sometimes feeling threatened by the committees; perceptions that some ward committee members aspire to become ward councillors, to the extent that they may deliberately try to undermine the ward councillor and derail ward committee processes; insufficient administrative and other resources allocated to ward committees to enable them to function effectively – for example, ward committee members having no money for transport to attend meetings; poor record keeping with regards to important service delivery decisions (Himlin, 2005; Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government, 2003; Piper & Deacon, 2008:43).

Given these realities, it can therefore be argued that the ability of ward committees to execute their duties effectively as intermediaries between municipal councils and communities is inhibited by a range of factors, including poor municipal communication strategies, illiteracy, lack of resources, as well as the lack of accessible information (Smith & De Visser, 2009: 20). For instance, the Project for Conflict Resolution and Development conducted a skills audit of 373 ward committee members in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in 2008. Findings of the study revealed that just 34 (9%) of the ward committee members had a post-matric qualification, while 59 (16%) of them did not have a matric qualification (Bendle, 2008:68). In the City of Johannesburg, Himlin (2005) found that a significant percentage of ward committee members did not understand their roles or had knowledge of how to carry out their duties. These deficiencies combine to compound challenges facing the WCS as a vehicle for public participation. There is a need for these issues to be addressed if the WCS is to stand up to the constitutional promise of effective public participation in IDP processes.

From the above, it could be discerned that the weaknesses in the WCS may pose a danger of ward committees becoming isomorphic, and serving as a means for the legitimation of already taken decisions (Cornwall, 2008: 270).

4.3.2 Facilitating the Integrated Development Planning process

IDP, as explained in the White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998b), is a process through which a municipality goes about putting together a plan for development with and for the people that it services. The IDP is a key mechanism for “hearing the voices” of communities and creating invited spaces for them to participate in IDP processes (Everatt et.al., 2010: 226; Phillips, 1996:24).

The role of ward committees in the IDP process is to work with municipalities to identify priorities for their communities and to formulate the most appropriate strategies for implementing and sustaining such development. For the IDP process to be participative, ward committees must mobilise community members to attend IDP meetings to input the development plan for their municipality.

The IDP processes is however not without challenges to. For instance, findings of a study conducted in Gauteng revealed that IDP processes were being perceived as too abstract, complex, and remote or too distant by some ward committee members (Everatt et. al., 2010:225). For instance, the IDP documents were too long, difficult to understand, and often written in English, and were therefore often inaccessible to people speaking languages other than English. This suggests that it was often difficult for ward committees from these areas to contribute to and influence decisions regarding he development planning process (Theron & Mchunu, 2014, Chapter 10: 111-128; Theron & Mchunu, 2016: 114-147).

The above scenarios suggest that the task of ward committees is often complicated by the fact that some municipalities are “out of touch” or not committed to making processes accessible to ordinary people, and are therefore not fully committed to public participation, despite this being a constitutional requirement (RSA, 1996). Those who are responsible for setting up public participation mechanisms often do not appreciate complexities of public participation. Lack of participation often has to do with how a municipality “invites” participants (Theron & Mchunu, 2014:54). This suggests therefore that public participation as a principle for DLG is often undermined, and development is often “for the people without the people”. In order for public participation to be empowering,

4.3.3 Participation in municipal budget processes

A municipal budget could be understood as a tool that enables municipal councils to direct economic, social, political and other relevant activities of its community (Geldenhuys, 1997:116). Decisions made during the budgeting process directly or indirectly affect the lives of ordinary individuals. In this case, a budget of a municipality requires the participation of the people who are going to be affected by it; hence, it must be made available and accessible to all interested parties in the community (Geldenhuys, 1997:116). This is in line with the conditions as set out in the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act (No. 56 of 2003) (RSA, 2003) that municipalities must report to their communities on the finances of the municipality.

The role of ward committees with regards to municipal budget processes lies in ensuring that all community members participate in the budget process (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a:18). However, the main challenge is that the budget information is usually difficult to understand and is hardly packaged in a way that makes accessible valuable information concerning budget allocations at ward level (Smith & De Visser, 2009:18).

4.3.4 Managing municipal performance

Municipalities are expected to conduct performance management assessments as a requirement in the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (RSA, 2000; Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), 2005a). After conducting performance management assessments, municipalities are expected to develop plans, which must include a comprehensive set of measures, key performance areas (KPAs), development objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), performance targets and the target dates. When doing this, municipalities are expected to ensure public participation in issues concerning the review of the municipality's performance. In this way, communities are afforded a platform to participate in the setting of relevant KPIs as well as performance targets since these aspects are based on their needs. Participation of communities in developing KPIs for the municipality therefore enhances accountability of the municipality – a critical aspect of participatory democracy.

Ward committees must discuss the performance of their municipalities, as well as implementation and review on behalf of the communities. During this process, ward committees must participate in identifying needs and ensuring that these needs are part of the budget proposals and plans. The municipal council is expected to provide regular updates concerning the performance of the municipality in the form of reports (Reddy & Sikhakane, 2008: 691).

However, the challenge is that some municipalities do not adhere to the principles described above. In their study on the Buffalo City Municipality, Reddy and Sikhakane (2008: 691) reported that municipal officials were often unresponsive to the needs of their communities, and that they often did not provide regular feedback regarding the implementation of the IDP. This means that communities were not provided with updates regarding development projects, expenditure as well as municipal performance.

It has generally been noted that ward committees do not have significant influence on decisions made by the municipal council or in the allocation of resources at ward level. For

instance, in the City of Johannesburg, Himlin (2005) reported frustration on the part of ward committee members regarding the fact that the municipal council did not consider their proposals and ideas for improvements. Part of the problem may largely be attributed to the fact that ward committees are led by ward councillors who have limited clout in their own political parties as they often occupy low rungs of the political party hierarchy, as observed by Oldfield (2008:494) who suggests that "... ward councillors are functionally challenged and often bound by the by caucus processes of their political party".

The above discussion suggests that a lot still needs to be done to ensure that the WCS is fully functional and that ward councillors comprehend their roles and responsibilities.

4.4 Challenges Experienced by Ward Committees

In their efforts to execute their duties effectively, ward committees are often confronted with various challenges, which have a negative impact on the execution of their mandate. A major challenge that needs to be addressed is the crumbling of municipal administration, mainly caused by vacant key posts (Atkinson, 2002:18). Shortages of staff often imply that a job is not being performed or the interim personnel may not be managing effectively, as they are juggling between two roles. Some officials have described experiences of spill-overs, whereby they must take on extra workloads because their municipalities are poorly staffed (Atkinson, 2002:18-23). All these factors affect the quality of support that is available to ward committees.

Concerns have been raised about representation in ward committees. In their study of the Msunduzi Local Municipality, Piper and Deacon (2008:43-45) observed poor representation of women, youth and disabled people in ward committees. They also noted skewed representation, with members of just one politically party dominating the membership of ward committees. This was often exacerbated by the uncomfortably close relationship of ward committees with branches of political parties, which were often pulled into political struggles of their political parties (Piper and Deacon, 2008:43-45).

The issues discussed above, and many others, are indicative of the challenges facing the WCS as a mechanism for public participation, as required principle for DLG.

4.5 Summary

The WCS, as an invited space, has impacted on other spaces that existed before it was conceived. An important observation is that in taking over and/or overlapping with other spaces, the WCS has tended to weaken and even banished other view of public participation. The problem is that ward committees have suppressed alternative, more appropriate and effective forms of participation, due the fact that they have often been regarded as the “alpha and omega” of public participation (Schmidt, 2008:13).

With ward committees in place, the requirements of law have been fulfilled. However, the problem has been that the WCS has often been overused and over-relied upon as a mechanism for public participation. This has had negative consequences in that the establishment of ward committees has affected organisations and structures that were already in existence when the WCS was established (Piper and Deacon, 2008:44). There is therefore a challenge in making the ward committee the only mechanism for public participation (Oldfield 2008:492). Ward committees are likely to be more effective if their work is complemented by other mechanisms of public participation. However, the WCS has a potential as a space for advancing public participation at local government level.

To take these debates and discussions into the key questions informing this study, the next chapter will present the methodological considerations that the researcher deployed in conducting the study – that is, how the researcher went about taking decisions about how the key issues of this study were to be investigated. Therefore, the next chapter will outline the methodological and design choices made, and provide a rationale for these choices.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGICAL AND DESIGN CHOICES AND CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters described the theoretical foundations of the study, and located the study within the broader scholarly debates on DLG, WCS and public participation. This chapter presents the methodological framework through which the study pursued the key research questions. The framework includes the research design, location and sampling procedure, research tools, data analysis, limitations of the study, as well as the ethical considerations.

This chapter will also provide motivations for the methodological and design choices that the researcher made. Prior to discussing the methodology, it is essential to reiterate that the main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of selected ward committee members within Greater Kokstad Municipality of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

5.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology entails the processes of considering assumptions about the research process, how data is to be generated to respond to the key research questions of a study, how such data is to be processed and analysed, what systems need to be in place to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of findings, and what claims the study can and cannot make based on available findings (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997: 28).

Researchers often locate their research processes within one of the two main research traditions, namely, qualitative and quantitative (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:28). Often, researchers adopt research traditions based on the nature of objectives the study seeks to achieve, as well as the purpose of the study (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:37). For this study, a qualitative research tradition was adopted, and assumptions that informed such a choice are expanded upon in the section below.

5.2.1 The qualitative approach

Qualitative research entails an understanding of research participants' subjective views and experiences (Marshall, 2005:134). Qualitative research is "fundamentally a descriptive form of research", whose intention is to examine the why and how questions, which view is contrary

to the quantitative approach, which seeks numerical answers to research questions (Welman et al., 2005:188). In qualitative research, data is often generated through the process that involves direct observation, in-depth questioning and analysis of subjective experiences of participants. Fossey, et al. (2002:717) argue that qualitative research is concerned with developing understandings of the meanings and experiences attached to human lives and their social worlds (Tutty et al., 1996: 52). Therefore, the qualitative research tradition constitutes research as a situated activity capable of locating the researcher in the world of those whose lives are being studied, using a variety of empirical materials and techniques (Joubert, 2007:3). This suggests that the strength of the qualitative approach is that it seeks to understand and interpret meanings that participants attach to their everyday lives (De Vos, 1998: 82)

The advantage of the qualitative approach is in its potential to generate and produce rich descriptive data, usually in the form of participants' own spoken or written words. This suggests that in qualitative research, participants' perspectives constitute the major aspect of the research process (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:29). This constituted a major part of the rationale for adopting the approach, to respond to the key research questions of the study.

It is the view of this study, that the qualitative research tradition was the most appropriate vehicle for enquiry, as the study sought to understand the subjective experiences of participants, who were selected ward committee members in Greater Kokstad Municipality (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:10).

5.2.2 Selection of participants

The selection of research participants constitutes a critical step in the research process (Marshall, 1996:522). Sample size is often driven by the purpose of the study, as well as the nature of the population. In determining the number of participants in a quantitative study, it is required that at least 10% of the study population must be considered for selection (Marshall, 1996:522). However, this requirement does not apply to a qualitative study as the intention is to obtain in-depth understanding rather generalising findings.

In line with the above, participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling (Babbie, 2007: 184; Maree & Pietersen, 2007: 178). Purposive sampling was appropriate given the fact that participants were selected based on a specific criterion, namely, that they were active members of a ward committee within the GKM (Babbie, 2007: 184). Thus, participants were selected, at the exclusion of all others, because they displayed certain

features that were important for achieving the objectives of the study (Strydom & Delport, 2005:198).

GKM is made up of eight (8) wards, and ward committees have been constituted in all the wards. Therefore, there are eight ward committees for the GKM. Each ward committee comprises ten (10) members. GKM is a highly politicised municipality, and the ward committee is one of the spaces where political struggles are waged in the municipality, which suggests that the WCS is a sensitive matter.

Given the above, the researcher had to tread cautiously so as not to act in a way that would place her in the "middle of the political storms" in the municipality, and end up with risks to the success of the study. Therefore, as a strategy to avoid running into the "political web" of the municipality, the researcher requested (through the Office of the Speaker) that participants be the secretary and two other members of the ward committee (i.e. three participants per ward committee). The two other participants were decided upon by ward committees themselves.

All in all, there were twenty-four (24) ward committee members who participated in the study. These were members who had been serving in the ward committee since 2011. This was important as the researcher wanted individuals who would be able to talk from a position of knowledge about the successes, challenges and opportunities of WCS in the GKM.

5.2.3 Piloting data generation instruments

Piloting of research instruments constitutes an important aspect of the process of conducting research as it helps to enhance of the quality of research instruments (Kanjee, 2006: 490; Marshall, 1996:522). The process of piloting research instruments presented an opportunity for the researcher to adapt the relevant aspects of research instruments (Gile, 2006:65).

In this study, the researcher requested four ward committee members who were from a nearby municipality to participate in the piloting of the instrument. After a discussion on the experiences revealed during the pilot exercise, recommendations were made and the instrument was adjusted and prepared accordingly for generating data at the GKM.

5.3 Data Collection Methods

5.3.1Focus group interviews

Focus groups are a form of qualitative interviews, which involves a researcher interviewing a small group of individuals (usually 6 to 10 members), and leading a discussion that seeks to generate specific qualitative data about a specific issue or set of issues relating to subjective experiences of participants and the key research questions of the study (Welman et al., 2007:201; Kitzinger, 1994: 103). In Taylor's (2005:39) words, focus group interviews seek to "capture, in the participants' own words, their thoughts, perceptions, feelings and experiences". This suggests that focus group interviews are a focused conversation with an objective, where a researcher and participants hold a discussion about an issue that is under discussion (Kitzinger, 1994: 103).

Essentially, focus group interviews differ from other kinds of interviews in that they involve the "explicit use of the group interaction" (Morgan, 1988: 12), and the fact that participants interact more with each other more than they do with the researcher, such that the views of the participate can dominate and emerge (Cohen et al., 2000: 288). This presents a space for participants or group members to challenge one another on specific aspects of how their sub-cultures are represented, in the manner that the individual interview is incapable of producing (Hyde et al., 2005: 1). The main advantage of focus group interviews as a research tool is that they have potential to allow the researcher ample opportunity to generate significant amounts of data within a short space of time (Cohen et al., 2000: 288).

Besides encouraging interaction between the researcher and participants, focus group interviews have a potential to provide a space for the researcher to have one or more individuals in one session, speaking on the same issue, and to ask for more clarification or probe further where necessary (Babbie, 2007: 308-309; Nieuwenhuis, 2007: 90; Cohen et al., 2000: 288). Focus group interviews also has potential to allow participants to express their emotions and experiences, which may not be possible in the conventional interview (Welman et al., 2007: 202). A benefit of the technique is that participants can expand on other participants' perspectives, provide data through a range of responses, be reminded of forgotten details of experience, thereby enriching the data generated (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:190; Nieuwenhuis, 2007: 90).

However, conducting focus group interviews also has its own challenges. For instance, the first one is the issue of confidentiality, namely, a researcher could take all the necessary

precautions and measures to ensure that participants are protected, and issues shared in confidence during the focus group discussion are kept confidential, but they have no control over participants' actions in this regard (Hyde et al., 2005: 6). To mitigate the possibility of this happening, the researcher worked with participants to set guidelines and rules regarding confidentiality, including the fact that nothing from the group discussion should be shared without the express consent from the person who shared as well as the group.

Another challenge with focus group interviews is that of ensuring that group members respect the opinions of other group members, and that group members are honest in what they share (Hyde et al., 2005: 6). Some of this uneasiness may happen because some participants experience focus groups as threatening (Nieuwenhuis, 2007: 90). This was the case with this study. At the beginning of the focus group discussions, group members seemed tense and uneasy to share their insights on issues under discussion, which triggered a need for the researcher to include in the ground rules the need to respect the views of others to ensure that participants could share freely. This also involved reiterating the fact that nothing from the sessions would and should be shared without prior permission from all the participants.

After the approval of the research proposal by the University, the researcher made appointments with the potential participants through email, phone calls and/or face-to-face contacts, requesting them to participate in the study.

Prior to conducting the focus group interviews, permission was sought from GKM Municipal Manager, which was granted as shown in Appendix 4. After obtaining permission from Municipal Council and the participants, the researcher organised a brief meeting during which participants were provided with an overview of the process and the procedures of the intended focus group interviews. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, venue, time, and how the focus groups would be structured. During that time, the researcher also asked participants to consent in writing to the recording of the proceedings. The most convenient time for all the participants was also discussed, and all agreed to have the interviews after their day's work.

The researcher prepared a standard interview guide, with a set of questions and/or areas to be covered based on the aspects of the research objectives that were considered important to cover. However, the intention was not for it to be followed religiously as a prescription, but as a "trigger" for discussion (Hyde et al., 2005: 5). The researcher developed the questions for the focus group interviews, which had been piloted as discussed above.

Prior to each focus group session, the researcher introduced herself and allowed participants an opportunity to introduce themselves. The intention of this exercise was to “break ice” and try and establish a relaxed conversation environment. Three sessions were held with eight participants per focus group on three different days. The reason for holding the sessions on different days was to allow the researcher time to reflect on the session and reframe things where it was necessary. Each session lasted for about two hours and the researcher ended the discussions upon realising that participants were becoming repetitive in their responses. Two groups preferred to hold discussions in isiXhosa as this was their home language, and the third group used English because it consisted of participants from a variety of language backgrounds. However, even in this group there were some instances where participants used IsiXhosa, which was translated into English by themselves for the benefit of other participants who could not understand IsiXhosa.

The conversations were tape-recorded (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed verbatim. Participants were initially reluctant to have the conversation recorded as they feared victimisation from politicians. There was a lengthy discussion in all three groups regarding this matter. Amongst the participants, there were participants who had been victimised before, who were for some reason no longer afraid to “come out”. These participants were instrumental in imploring others to allow the researcher to record the conversations. This was in line with what Bateson (2012: 570) argues, that victimisation and exposure to political violence may result in increased (political) participation.

Throughout the sessions, the researcher assumed the role of moderator to facilitate the discussions and probe where necessary. The researcher had also enlisted the services of a research assistant, whose role was to setup the venue, take notes to supplement the recorded material. In case there were technical challenges, take responsibility technical operation of the digital recorder, in addition to being on standby to attend to any form of interruption, as recommended by Greef (2005: 299). The researcher also took notes, especially regarding the non-verbal cues of the participants as well as her own personal reactions to the responses provided by the participants.

The researcher consolidated, transcribed and processed the data generated after each focus group discussion, in preparation for the next session.

5.3.2 Document analysis

Although some documents were regarded as confidential, the Municipality was willing to allow the researcher access to its documents on condition that they remained confidential. Through document analysis, the researcher conducted a careful examination of the relevant documents such as development planning, reports of development projects, minutes of meetings of ward committees, the IDP, minutes of community meetings, etcetera. The researcher used documents and artefacts to understand the context and triangulate data elicited through focus group interviews. The information generated from these artefacts provided a perspective on both the ward committee structures being written about and the individuals responsible for these documents.

5.4 Data Analysis

5.4.1 Analysis of focus group discussion data

Like all qualitative analysis, analysis was initiated concurrent to data generation (Rabiee, 2004: 657). Analysis of data entailed organising and synthesising generated data into meaningful and understandable chunks. This involved reducing large volumes of data by identifying, selecting and grouping data into patterns and meaningful thematic trends (De Vos, 2005:28). Preliminary data analysis involved listening to the recorded audios several times while jotting down notes and making verbatim transcriptions. The process assisted the researcher to familiarise herself with the responses and to begin to identify emerging and overlapping themes.

The researcher used stages of analysis of focus group interview data as suggested by Rabiee (2004: 657- 660), namely:

- **Generation of data**: This involved the researcher skilfully facilitating the discussion and generating rich data from the interview, complementing them with the observational notes and typing the recorded information.
- **Familiarisation with the data**: This was achieved by listening to recorded data for several times, reading the transcripts in their entirety several times and reading the observational notes taken during focus group discussions and summary or reflection notes written immediately after the focus group interview sessions. The intention here was for the researcher to immerse herself in the data to obtain a general sense of the discussion in its entirety, and to identify emerging and overlapping themes.

- **Identifying a thematic framework**: To do this, the researcher wrote memos in the margin of the text in the form of short phrases, ideas and concepts arising from reading and thinking about the data and beginning to frame categories in relation to the key research questions. Thereafter, descriptive statements were formulated.
- **Indexing of data**: This stage comprised of a process of sifting the data, foregrounding and organising quotes and making comparisons.
- **Charting the data**: This involved lifting quotes from the transcribed data and organising them under the newly-developed thematic chunks, which included comparing data and grouping similar quotes together.

5.4.2 Analysis of data from documents

The researcher also consulted secondary data, such as the municipality's strategic documents (IDP, legislative documents, as well as the municipal annual reports). The intention here was to obtain a global understanding of the context of the work of ward committees as well as how they are located within the broader context within municipalities. The researcher read through the documents, comparing it with what was emerging from focus group interview data, and contextualising it within the broader trajectory of the study. Hereafter, the researcher clustered identified topics into categories and themes, which was then coded into sub-themes and categories. Classifying the data was important to identify if there were significant differences in perceptions from focus groups (Welman et al., 2007:213).

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Consideration of ethics is a necessity for any research, whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. In any research study, it is the responsibility of the researcher to consider ethical questions to ensure the protection of the participants' rights. Therefore, caution was taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity during the research process. This was ensured using pseudonyms and removing any information that could potentially point to and/or identify participants. In addition, participants were requested not to discuss their responses and/or the details of the discussions from focus group sessions with anyone, particularly outside of the sessions, except with the researcher and the researcher's supervisor.

Secondly, to ensure that participants had a clear understanding of what the study entailed before committing to participating in it, the researcher met with the participants to explain the aim and processes of the study, and assured them that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any point during the

research process without any negative consequences (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 289). In addition, participants were assured that all data generated would only be used for academic purposes (i.e. to meet the requirements of the qualification).

5.6 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Samuel (1990:1) defines validity, which is referred to as credibility in qualitative research, as the veracity of the findings as well as their capability to support the claims and interpretations being made to respond to the key research questions of the study. In this study, credibility of findings was enhanced through a process called member-checking, where participants were given an opportunity to verify and validate transcriptions. This also involved a process where at the end of each group session, the researcher shared emerging issues with the participants for confirmation or clarification (Kidd & Parshall, 2000: 299).

Trustworthiness involves and relates to the extent to which findings are feasible within the methodological and design choices made (Merriam, 1995:55). This suggests that data generation methods must be relevant and appropriate as a mechanism and strategy to generate data capable of responding to the key research questions of the study. Within the context of this study, focus group interviews were used to generate data on the experiences and perceptions of participants (who were ward committee members) on the extent and meaning of their participation in issues that related to community development. The analysis of key documents was used to gather data on the context in which participants' experiences were embedded.

5.7 Unanticipated Challenges

5.7.1 Challenges relating to access to participants

Every study has its limitations and challenges. Within the context of this study, these related largely to issues of access to participants, as the researcher had to satisfy gatekeepers, who were largely individuals with specific political affiliations, that the study did not pose any reputational risks for them and the municipality. Initially, it was difficult to obtain permission from the Municipal Manager to conduct the study with ward committees, as ward committees are viewed as having intimate knowledge about issues relating to service delivery.

Authorisation and permission to conduct research was granted after a waiting period of approximately three months, leading to a significant delay in commencing with the data-generation process and other related processes. Once permission to conduct research was

granted, getting participants to agree on dates for conducting sessions was a nightmare, as there were too many competing activities which required participation of the participants. It was therefore almost impossible to secure a time that was convenient to all the participants. This resulted in many delays to the focus group interview sessions after some participants indicated at the last minute that they could not make the stipulated dates and time.

5.7.2 Challenges relating to data generation

During focus group interview sessions, some participants were reluctant to express themselves, and this resulted in the researcher having to direct questions to individuals, asking them for their opinions, which sometimes could not yield much. This often led to the challenge of the domination of discussions by a few participants, which made it difficult for the researcher to obtain views of the whole group. This suggests that the group setting might have influenced the responses of some individuals, which was exacerbated by some participants dominating the eventual directions and outcomes of the discussions. The researcher had to use group facilitation skills to mitigate domination of discussions by individual participants and create space for equitable participation of all participants in the discussions. The researcher did this because they were of the view that if the researcher did not moderate this phenomenon, it was likely to result in the elevation of dominant views, while other equally important and possibly dissenting views were subdued (Smithson, 2000: 107-108).

Face-to-face interviews have a high risk of interviewee effect, where participants feel a need to provide information that they think the researcher expects to hear from them. As such, the researcher had to mitigate this effect by establishing rapport with the participants, and assuring them that their views were valuable.

5.8 Summary

Research essential involves going from questions (the unknown) to findings (what can be known). Getting to the known requires a systematic and reliable process capable of providing credible and trustworthy findings to the research questions. The systematic process of finding answers is about deciding on and finding the most relevant research methodology (theoretical foundations and perspectives) and design (i.e. strategies and techniques for data generation) to respond to the key research questions of the study. The actualisation and implementation of methodological and design choices and decisions may inevitably lead to complex navigations of the research process, mired with both challenges and opportunities.

This chapter provided a case study of the methodological and design opportunities and obstacles confronted in this study, and how the researcher took advantage of and/or got around these to integrate the study. The study adopted a qualitative research tradition as it was appropriate for accessing and understanding subjective experience of ward committee members. The study explored subjective experiences and perspectives of selected members of ward committees with a view to accessing and understanding their experiences of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

Given the above, the next chapter presents the findings that emerged because of the methodological and design choices and attempts to make sense of the findings in line with the study's key research questions, a process that is guided by the researcher's epistemological and ontological orientations. In addition, the theoretical understandings from Chapter 2, 3 and 4 are deployed in trying to make sense of the findings.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the methodological and design choices that were applied in this study. This chapter will now offer a presentation of the findings. It is important to reiterate that the objective of the study was to explore the views of selected ward committee members of their experiences of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

The discussion of findings is based on the themes that emerged from the data in line with the focus and the key research questions of the study. This was important for providing a compass for the study that would integrate the study together and ensure that the study did not divert from its focus.

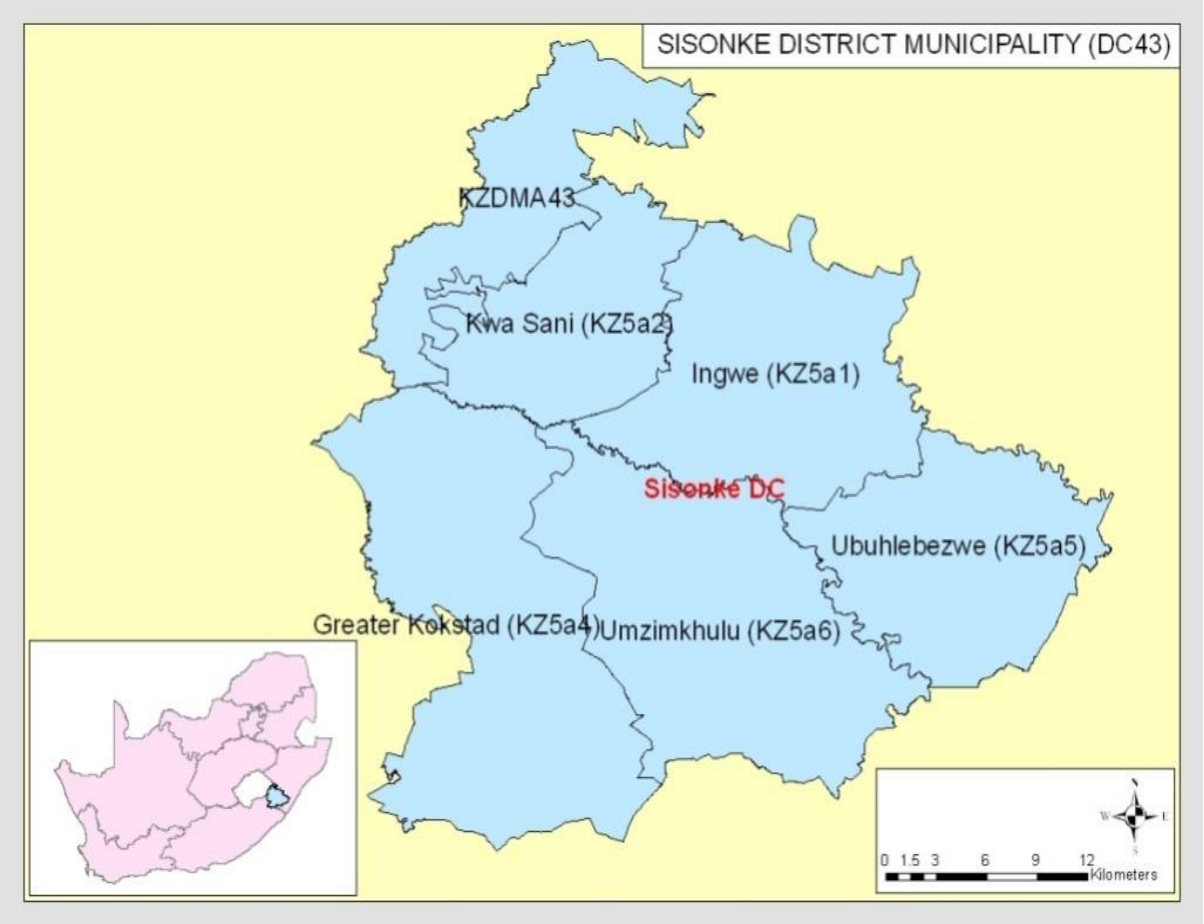
6.2 Overview of the Greater Kokstad Municipality

The intention of this section is to situate experiences of ward committee members within the contextual setting of the Greater Kokstad Municipality (GKM). The intention is to expose factors that may have had an influence on how these experiences played out, and how participants told their story.

GKM is one of five municipalities under the Harry Gwala District (previously known as Sisonke District). The municipality covers areas at the south-western tip of KwaZulu-Natal province. To the north of the municipality is the KwaSani Local Municipality, with Umuziwabantu Local Municipality to the southeast and the Eastern Cape to the east. To the west of GKM is Matatiele Local Municipality and Lesotho. Kokstad is regarded as the regional service centre and the main economic hub for most of East Griqualand and neighbouring parts of the province of Eastern Cape, with which it shares borders (GKM, 2013:13). The municipal boundaries came about due to the demarcation process that resulted in the reduction of the number of municipalities, from almost 1 000 to 278 throughout South Africa.

Below is the representation of the municipal boundaries as they currently stand in GKM (Demarcation Board, 2004). In 2010, the number of wards within the jurisdiction of GKM increased from six (6) to eight (8) (Demarcation Board, 2010).

Fig. 5.1: The Greater Kokstad Map



Source: GKM IDP (2013)

The vision of GKM is “to see the Greater Kokstad Municipality developing into a caring municipality and Kokstad town into a city” (GKM, 2013:13). From 1995 to 2004, the municipality had a collective executive system that was re-determined as the collective executive system with a ward participatory system through the amendment of a Section 12 notice, as provided for in terms of Section 16 of Chapter 2 of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a). In 2005, GKM changed from being a collective executive system combined with a WPS type of municipality. Arising from this decision, GKM established and launched ward committees (GKM, 2004:8). This move was informed by the need to set up the ward committees to strengthen public participation systems and processes, as required by Section 17(1), Chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act (RSA, 2000).

The report by Statistics South Africa (2016) indicates that the population for GKM is 76 753 (up from 65 981 in 2011), with 24 397 households (up from 19 140 in 2011). The average household size is 3.1 members, and 43.7% of households are female-headed (up from 41.6% in 2011). Education levels for individuals 20 years and older are as follows: no schooling: 1.6

% (down from 4.1% in 2011); matric: 34.9% (up from 28.3% in 2011); and higher education: 9.5% (down from 10.8% in 2011). The official unemployment rate stood at 28.9%, and youth (i.e. 15-34 years of age) unemployment at 36.3%.

Households that have toilets connected to the sewerage system stand at 66.2% (up from 60.1% in 2011). 88.6% of households have electricity for lighting.

The Auditor-General has given the Municipality an unqualified audit opinion with findings for the following financial years: 2012/13; 2013/14 and 2014/15. The Municipality had instances of irregular expenditure and fruitless and wasteful expenditure for all three financial years:

- 2012/13: Irregular expenditure: R16 113 000: Fruitless and wasteful expenditure: R261 000;
- 2013/14: Irregular expenditure: R2 040 000: Fruitless and wasteful expenditure: R493 000; and
- 2014/15: Irregular expenditure: R2 167 000: Fruitless and wasteful expenditure: R214 000.

With regards to LED, GKM has two key projects running, namely, One Home One Garden Project and a Bakery Project in Shayamoya. Key investment opportunities that exist in the Municipality are the development of the mall; municipal market; light industrial park; small town rehabilitation; eco-park; and tourist strategy (that has not yet been adopted by the municipal council).

6.3 Profiles of Participants

From 24 participants, 15 were women while 9 were men. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 58 years, and 19 were black and 5 coloured (all of whom were women). Twelve (12) of the participants reported that they were unemployed, four (4) were self-employed, and eight (8) were employed. In terms of education, four (4) had a matric certificate, two (2) had a tertiary qualification and the rest (i.e. 18 participants) had an education level below matric.

6.4 Knowledge of the Roles and Responsibilities of Ward Committees: Does It Suffice?

Upon asking ward committees what their roles and responsibilities entailed and if they knew what was expected of them, fourteen (14) indicated that they knew what their roles and

responsibilities were as ward committee members. Ten (10) participants were unsure about what their roles and responsibilities entailed.

Although ward committees had been established, only two of the eight were functional. They attended meetings, but it was unclear how they had advanced the development interests of their communities. In some cases, they were unsure of the needs of the communities, as ward profiles had not been compiled. In addition, their meetings and the content thereof depended largely on the competence of the councillor. Where the councillor was ineffective, ward committee members had not taken any initiative to push for public participation. For instance, they had not raised the challenges with the Office of the Speaker as required in terms of the law. The following statements point to these realities:

"The councillor is not available; he is very busy. We can't meet without him. He must chair the meetings. If he is not there, there is nothing we can do".

"The councillor sets the agenda of the meeting. She gives report back to the meetings and we ask questions where we are not clear. However, sometimes there are issues where there are no answers, and we do not know what to tell people".

"If your councillor is from the opposition, our discussions are always about why things are not happening. Sometimes there are conflicts between the councillor and other ward committee members who come from other political parties".

"It's the councillor that have to call the meetings. Our councillor has not called any meeting. We are ready and we are waiting for him to call the meeting. We can't call the meeting ourselves".

The above statements point to the fact that although some ward committee member understood their roles and responsibilities, the functioning of the ward committees was largely disabled without a competent and willing local councillor. That is, the default position was excessive dependence on the councillor to initiate public participation, largely because the design of a ward committee is tied around the person of a local councillor and the fact that the councillor is the only link between the community and the council. Ward committee members did not think that the responsibility to initiate public participation was up to them, although it was more for their good than for their councillor.

This is problematic in several aspects. First, if the councillor is not competent, there may be few or no options for the ward committee. For instance, the councillor may be disinclined to convene the meetings because without the meetings, the councillor knows they would be able to get away with poor service delivery – there will be no space for the ward committees to hold the councillor accountable for their performance. Secondly, interests on why public participation must take place may be too different. The ward councillor may feel that they need the people towards the elections, while the people feel that they need the ward councillor to deliver after the elections. Given that the councillor must convene and chair the ward committee meetings, they may not think it is necessary to do so based on their interests. Thirdly, there is no incentive for ward councillors to want to make ward committees to work. The incentive to make ward committees work might lie with communities, who may want to be involved, yet it is the councillor that should initiate their participation. If a councillor views them as an unnecessary burden, an interference or as contesting their position, they will have every incentive not to make them work.

From the point of view of this study, although there may be sound reasons for the burden of initiating public participation to reside with the council, the whereabouts of incentive to make public participation work beyond “consultation” for legitimation is unclear. Literature reveals that ward committees are unable to go beyond being a concept, that it is frankly unable to enhance authentic public participation (Ntlemeza, 2007: 116-119; Nyalunga, 2006: 45; Khuzwayo, 2009: iv; Mosotho, 2013: ii). This may have led to communities unwilling to participate in the WCS, as reported by the participants, as they had no confidence that something sound would result from their participation.

In this study, ward committee members were paid a stipend for meetings. It is therefore unclear whether ward committee members were participating because they valued participation in the ward committee or whether they participated because it provided them with some income. For instance, participants reported poor attendance of meetings of ward committee meetings despite the presence of the stipend. This may indicate that although the stipend may be understood as an incentive to participate actively in the activities and programmes of the ward committees, this may not be working in the context of ward committees in GKM. However, this may also suggest that there may be other commitments that may be competing with participation in the WCS.

From the above, although roles and responsibilities of ward committees are understood, this is largely unable to lead to the effectiveness of the ward committee system and enhanced public participation. That is, the knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of ward

committees, like all other knowledge, may not lead to active participation in the ward committee system or the enhancement of a public participation "culture". This is largely because there is a catalogue of other variables that may be involved in the operation of the WCS in GKM.

6.5 Ward Committees and the Politics of Representation

Ward committees are supposed to be apolitical and focus on advancing development interests of their communities. However, in this study election of ward committee members was often viewed as political representation. For instance, participants reported that often community members perceived them as:

"agents of political parties … people who are a mouthpiece of their political parties, who are not there because they have the interests of the community at heart".

"Community members believe that ward committee members are puppets of ward councillors … and that we are here to promote our political parties…I think we are also not doing a good job in changing this view, because we sometimes fall into this trap".

"… Some ward councillors have their own political agendas and mandates that they fight to fulfil in ward committee meetings, and this leads to clashes with ward committees, where ward committees are able to stand their ground, but where they are not, councillors get away with it and use ward committees as their political horses…"

The above suggests that ward committees were often viewed as subject to the control by their political parties, and to be serving their political parties, and not their community as envisaged in their conceptualisation. There is evidence that political parties often have an interest in the composition of ward committees, and that there have been instances of disputes of elections of ward committees based on the politicisation of the processes. For instance, in Ethekwini Municipality, the opposition called for ward committees to be disbanded as they had "become a conduit for the ANC to divert ratepayers' money to their comrades". The political struggles around the WCS is unfortunate as it can only serve to discredit and undermine the value of the system as a device for authentic public participation.

If ward committees are politicised and/or ward committee members take their mandate from political parties rather than their constituency, which are the communities, they are likely to be pulled into inter- and intraparty politics. For instance, if there are factional battles in their

political parties, they are likely to be drawn into these struggles, which may pose reputational risks for them, and potentially undermine their objectivity as a voice of their communities. Furthermore, politicised ward committees are likely to protect the underperforming councillor if they belong to the same political party faction with them and, in the process, undermine the mandate of ward committees. In another instance, ward committee members who belong to a faction may unfairly attack a councillor who may be viewed as their political rival, and make it difficult for the councillor to preside over the activities of the ward committee as chairperson of the ward committee.

The implications for the politicisation of the WCS stretch beyond making it difficult for ward committees to maintain their apolitical and objective stance; it has potential to undermine the very activism it seeks to advance in communities, and obliterate any semblance of civil society power that remains in communities. When this happens, the power to do the "right thing" resides with the council, and there is no mechanism to hold them to account for their performance in terms of the interests of communities. That is, the agency that would ensure that the ward committee is a transformative space, is therefore taken away. For instance, if the ward councillor chooses to function as a "loose cannon", there is very little on the side of the politically contaminated ward committee to stop them. What is even more serious is that when the WCS was introduced, it may have redirected the energy of activism from other forms of civil society power to the WCS as a legitimate system of representation, and if the WCS has become a "toothless entity", there is no civil society power left in the communities. That is, when invited spaces fail, community members tend to look for alternative ways of making their voices heard, such as service delivery protests.

6.6 Discourses of Dependence on the Municipal Council

Structures of civil society are supposed to be independent from those who they are supposed to hold accountable. However, in this study, participants seemed to view their effectiveness as tied to the municipal council as an indispensable aspect of their work. For instance, ward committee members expected the municipal council to:

"The council must ensure that ward committees are properly established and trained. We have requested our councillor to request this on our behalf. It is the responsibility of the council".

"The municipality must ensure that communities are involved in projects. They must conduct imbizos to ensure that people participate in taking decisions about development projects".

"The council must ensure that councillors work with ward committee members, and that they convene meetings. Ward committee members have no powers to call meetings".

The problem with the above discourses of dependence is that these are likely to cast ward committees as being captured by the municipal council. In addition, excessive dependence on the municipal council may also weaken the ability to utilise the invited space creatively in terms of how ward committees could ensure that they can play by the rules (i.e. to operate within the WCS), but ensure that ward committees are utilised as transformative spaces where they can influence and redirect decision making processes for the benefit of their communities, whether the municipal council likes it or not. What this excessive dependence is likely to create is a situation where the very same people who purport to want to participate (i.e. ward committee members), believe that public participation is not a project worth their participation – because it is what the municipal council must do.

The above may point to the complexities of operating within invited spaces. For instance, the purpose of the invited space (such as a ward committee) has an impact on what is possible within that space. Therefore, ward committee members need to understand that ward committees are embedded within existing power relations, rather than immune and insulated to the power relations. If ward committee members are unaware of this complexity, they are likely to reproduce echoes of what used to happen before public participation was constitutionalised, and failed to amplify and actualise public participation as entrenched in the democratising promise.

In addition, discourses of dependence have harmful implications for the standing of ward committees in communities. The question is: How is it likely that ward committees would bite the hand that feeds them? That is, if they are so dependent on the municipal council, how would they be able to maintain their value as the "voice" of their communities? In this study, these discourses of dependence on the municipal council had negative consequences for the standing of ward committees in their communities. For instance, participants reported that some community members viewed them as:

"… agents of the municipality … who take orders from the municipal council, who represent the interests of the municipal council. This caused us to lose our legitimacy, and

weakens our role in representing our communities. We sit there with no-one believing that we are representing them".

It is true that ward committees need support from the municipal council to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. However, the assumption that ward committees and the municipal council have the same interests for why public participation should be encouraged and what it must achieve, may be problematic. The other assumption is that the municipal council wants ward committees to be effective in the execution of their mandate, when it might not be always so. These issues need to be interrogated if the WCS is to function as an effective conduit for public participation. The current situation, where there exists little or no understanding that the interests of the municipal council may conflict with those of the ward committee members, may be the reason why some participants felt that:

"…our presence doesn't matter … our role is merely advising ward councillors and supporting the council's predetermined goals".

"We do not have impact or influence on the allocation of resources at ward level or on decisions made by the council".

"We are expected to forward our issues to the ward councillor who reports to the Speaker. The Speaker then tables ward committees' concerns for discussion with portfolio committees. Sometimes ward councillors do not submit our concerns to the Speaker, meaning that our issues do not get a chance to be discussed. Sometimes it is the Speaker who fails to discuss the matters with the relevant portfolio committees"

"We are normally called to meetings just to be there but we are not given the opportunity to say yes or no, which is a very important aspect of participation. We are not given space to engage; we have to be present and be quiet".

The above scenario casts ward committees as advising the ward councillor or a given hierarchy rather than holding them accountable for delivering on the development needs of their communities. The fact that they see themselves as "supporting predetermined goals" rather than engaging actively with those that are supposed to deliver on the election promises, may not do much in recasting ward committees differently, as a voice of their communities. Instead, it may support, or even strengthen, the claims by communities that ward communities do not work for them, and that they are just window-dressing mechanisms at municipal level.

In addition, where there are ward committees, the study found that they existed only as "symbols of public participation" in that they had no voice or influence in development planning processes, and were therefore unable to articulate the needs of the communities. The following statements represent these sentiments:

> *"… we would appreciate a platform to raise our concerns directly to the portfolio committees concerned. This could help solve some of the problems that affect us as ward committees in our participation in local governance. This, however, may not be possible because it would seem as if we are trying to undermine and usurp the powers of the ward councillors and the Speaker. Despite having the option to voice their concerns on the council agenda through the IDP, the problem is that municipal officials sometimes delay to respond to such issues…"*

The construction and casting of ward committees in the discourses as reflected in this section is problematic in that it poses serious implications for the vision of DLG, where the aim of public participation is to democratise development and align it with the needs of communities. In other words, ward committees, as they are in this study, may be unsuitable as a vehicle for ensuring people-driven development. Public participation, as found in this study, has "become a form of tyranny" , a tick-box compliance exercise in South Africa (Cooke & Kothari, 2001)

6.7 Discourses of Public Participation: Who Needs Public Participation?

The influence of and the need to be seen to have democratised has led to good governance being associated with public participation as its requirement (White, 1996: 142). However, such an understanding of public participation creates an impression that everyone wants to participate in everything, and is oblivious of the fact that people who have other commitments and/or options may evade participation.

One of the issues that emerged from the discourses of public participation in this study was the fact that participants expected everyone in the community to participate. The following excerpts point to the assumption that participants believed that for public participation to work, everyone needed to be present:

"The problem is poor attendance of scheduled community meetings. People do not attend meetings. Everyone must participate in the processes when meetings are called".

"The community should be involved in everything that includes them. They should attend all meetings held by the Municipality".

"It is not very easy working with people as the community members are very difficult people. They don't even attend meetings".

"Public participation requires the community to participate in government programmes … Community members must attend all community meetings.

"One of the major challenges is people who do not attend meetings. Attendance at community meetings are important, even if you are not going to benefit directly. If people don't attend, the council will think we are not serious about our needs".

"The main challenge is that community members only participate when they feel that they are being affected by some municipal policies or when they have certain problems regarding service delivery. Participation by community members seems to only be taken seriously by those who would be more affected while others seem unbothered about participating in community processes".

The assumption that people have been excluded and want to participate loses sight of the fact that authentic public participation occurs when people believe that their participation will make a positive difference in their lives. For instance, although a community gardening project is an important initiative, people who are in fulltime employment that pays well will not understand the need for attending meetings about the community gardening project. This brings to the fore the question of interests, that is, do people have a stake. If ward committees want people to attend meetings on the community gardening project, then there will be poor attendance at these meetings because these people's interests and time are dedicated to their fulltime jobs.

If people feel that their attendance will not change or influence anything of the "predetermined goals", they may not attend meetings. They may feel that attending the meetings is likely to give the processes legitimacy. So, staying away would most probably be a better way of empowering themselves. However, this is not to say that public participation is not important. Public participation is important, but it must be relevant to the context of communities. In other words, public participation provides a useful mechanism for people not to be compelled to use manipulation tactics and covert resistance to express their needs (White, 1996: 154). Of course, people need to participate, but public participation needs to be understood for what it

is: public participation is about interests, and interests are a product of power relations in society. Therefore, public participation needs to be relevant to the diversity of these interests.

Another issue that needs to be remember with regards to public participation is that people may choose to participate at different stages of the process based on their interests in what is being delivered; otherwise they will be absent. So, expecting everyone to participate takes a view that communities are homogenous entities rather that entities with a catalogue of diverse interests. Therefore, for the WCS to work, it needs to problematise conventional understandings of public participation, and relocate public participation within a "radical politics" of IDP (Hickey & Mohan, 2005: 237).

6.8 Challenges in the ward committees System

Despite having agreed to become members of ward committees, participants reported several impediments that impacted negatively on the performance of ward committees, which they felt required the attention of municipal authorities. The following section is a discussion of some of these challenges.

6.8.1 Low education levels

Even though some participants had matric, it was sometimes difficult for them to read and understand municipal documents. This was largely because of the technical language that was often used in municipal reports and documents. Participants felt that this was disempowering and that it undermined them as legitimate participants in development planning processes. One of the participants felt that:

"It would be better to not attend meetings if you are going to be embarrassed for not contributing due to the lack of understanding. What's the point of attending when you can't follow or contribute? What do they expect us to do? Go back to school?"

The issue above is much more than education levels; it is about access to the content of documents, and the question of whether there is willingness on the part of the municipal council for ward committee members to participate in IDP processes. Lack of access to what is contained in documents under discussion is a sure way of reducing and undermining meaningful engagement. For meaningful participation and engagement to happen, authors of the documents must consider the needs of their audience.

6.8.2 A stipend that is too little

Ward committee members receive a stipend of R1000 to cover their expenses relating to the work of ward committees. They were adamant that compensation must be graduated from a stipend to a salary. However, even though Section 77 of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) (RSA, 1998a), confines remuneration of ward committees to the reimbursement for costs incurred carrying out the business of ward committees, this has serious implications for how public participation may be constructed in the process. Public participation arises from activism rather than from monetary gain. So, constructing public participation as something for which people must be remunerated could create a situation where people may become part of ward committees based on inappropriate grounds. If the understanding is that people become part of ward committees because of monetary gain, it is likely to erode activism as a necessary requirement for membership in the ward committee.

This view may be emanating from the high levels of unemployment in communities and the disparities in wage gaps, which is now threatening the effectiveness of the WCS as a component of civil society power.

6.8.3 Relationship with structures that existed before ward committees

Participants reported that often they were often challenged by some traditional leaders who felt that they were being undermined, following the taking over of some of their responsibilities by ward councillors and ward committees. They reported that the tension that exists in these areas impacted negatively on the work of ward committees, as they were often associated with attempts to strip traditional leaders of their powers. In addition, participants reported that other structures, such as the ratepayers' association, believed that the establishment of ward committees had displaced them. Therefore, ward committees were considered as a duplication of mechanisms and structures already existing in communities. As much as some community members considered ward committees as a more constructive means for participation, others viewed the WCS in a negative light.

6.8.4 Absence of a protocol for access to information

The availability and accessibility of relevant information is a cornerstone of public participation in local governance (Ababio, 2004: 286). As such, ward committees, as agents of change in communities, must be guided by a clear communication strategy. This study revealed the absence of a protocol for how ward committees are to access relevant information, in cases where there were challenges. For instance, participants reported difficulty in accessing

information that was vital for their functioning as a link between communities and the council. Participants reported that sometimes there "*were delays in accessing information that is important for our roles as ward committee members*".

Another issue linked to the issue of access to information was that they did not receive reports regularly, and were thus unable to provide prompt feedback to communities, because "*we always have to tell community members that we will find the information*". Participants felt that the unavailability of information timeously was disempowering, and made it difficult for them to hold ward councillors accountable, and provide feedback to communities. Participants believed that the effectiveness of ward committees depended largely on them being up to date with issues that affect their communities.

6.8.5 Ward committee meetings

Meetings of ward committees are dependent on the availability and competence of the ward councillor, who must serve as its chairperson (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005a: 5). Participants reported that there were challenges regarding meetings of ward committees, and these included, inter alia, no schedule of meetings for the year; poor meeting procedures (e.g. meetings which are convened without an agenda); municipal officials who do not honour meetings; councillors coming to meetings unprepared; councillors who want to push the agenda of their political party; and incompetent councillors. If public participation matters in this context, there is a need for these issues to be resolved.

6.9 Effectiveness of the Ward Committee System: What Next?

When asked about what could be done to improve the performance of ward committees, participants raised a basket of remedies, which are briefly discussed below:

- **Relationship with council**: The relationship between ward committees and council is crucial for active public participation. For participants in this study, the starting point was for municipal officials to honour ward committee meetings and provide necessary documents in an accessible format. They argued that, in most cases, "*we are invited to participate in issues that have been already decided upon*". Above all, they appealed for ward committees to be treated with the dignity and respect as legitimate representatives of their communities.

- **Clear demarcation of roles**: Participants felt that it was important that roles and responsibilities of ward committees with regards to service delivery are articulated clearly rather than depending on the Act, which provided broad definitions.

- **Training and development**: Participants also underlined the importance of training and development for ward committees. They believed that the municipal council must invest in training and development programmes intended for the improvement of ward committees' expertise. They argued that council must ensure that ward committees are trained and qualified to execute their delegated functions. There was a belief that "*capacity building and empowerment of ward committees could help GKM in the long run to accelerate service delivery in our communities*".

From the above, participants want the WCS to work. However, there is at the same time acknowledgement of the fact that ward committees are not functioning to their full potential due to the challenges as outlined above. Therefore, it is important to take account of the issues discussed in this chapter to ensure that the WCS does provide hope that public participation is on the right track in GKM.

6.10 Summary

The WCS presents a real opportunity as a site for the transformation of IDP in municipalities. However, as revealed by the findings of this study, conventional understandings of public participation may not be able to lead to meaning public participation. Findings reveal that although "islands of excellence" exist, the WCS in GKM is mired in morass of dysfunctionality. Often, public participation serves as means for the legitimation of already taken decisions, and that although the ward committee presents an "invited space" for public participation, authentic participation is largely impossible. In other words, GKM must take advantage of the WCS and utilise it as a conduit for empowering public participation.

Given the above, the following chapter will present a consolidation of key findings and recommendations for the study. In addition, it will provide limitations to which the study was subjected, and possible avenues for further research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This study explored the experiences of selected ward committee members of their participation in the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

The purpose of this chapter is to consolidate and highlight the key findings of the study. This will be followed by specific recommendations, based on the findings, for how ward committee members experienced the WCS in GKM. The last section of this chapter will present major issues relating to the WCS and public participation that emerged from the study, as a way of lifting these issues for those who are involved in public participation to consider going forward.

The argument put forth in this study is that conventional ways of understanding public participation tend to depoliticise and weaken public participation, and that these constructions need to be troubled for public participation to begin to serve communities rather than itself.

7.2 Consolidation and Summary of the Key findings

7.2.1 Objectives of the study

To address the research problem, the following objectives for the study were crafted as indicated under 1.4.2, above:

- Explore and understand the experiences of selected ward committee members of their experiences in the WCS.
- Explore the potential barriers, obstacles and opportunities to the maximum functionality of the WCS.
- Assess the extent to which the WCS in GKM serves to give voices to local people to articulate and place in the mainstream their issues relating to development in the area.
- Map out what the implications of the findings are for the effective implementation of the WCS in GKM, and South Africa in general.

7.2.2 Research hypotheses and propositions

The research hypotheses and propositions that the study sought to test were as follows as indicated under 1.5 above:

- **The ward committee system provides an effective voice for communities to articulate and influence the consideration of their development needs in municipal development processes.**

  The findings revealed that there are challenges with regards to the effectiveness of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation in GKM. For instance, the fact that the ward councillor must serve as the chairperson of the ward committee presented as a major challenge in that the effectiveness of the ward committee was tied to the competence and willingness of the ward councillor to make the ward committee work. In addition, participants reported that often some ward councillors used ward committees to advance the political agendas of their political parties. In some cases, ward committees were viewed by communities as being captured and serving the interests of their political party and/or municipal councils rather than their communities.

  In some communities, ward committees were viewed as a duplication of the structures that existed before the introduction of ward committees, such as traditional councils and national civic organisations. In this instance, ward committees were often accused of having usurped the powers of these structures, which often eroded their legitimacy as representatives of their communities.

  The mix of these variables often had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the WCS as a vehicle for public participation.

- **The reasons for dysfunctionalities and functionalities in the ward committee system are largely a mix structural, political, social, economic and operational dynamics.**

  Findings of the study revealed that the dysfunctionalities and functionalities originated from the mix of the structural, political, social, economic and operational dynamics. For instance, the very design of the WCS which ties it to the ward councillor was found to be problematic as it tied the effectiveness of the WCS on the competence and willingness of the ward councillor to make the WCS work. In this study, election of ward committee members was often viewed as vehicle for the advancement of party political interests. Ward committee members were often used as a political appendage used to advance positions and agendas of their political parties. In some cases, communities

viewed ward communities as "*agents of municipal councils*", serving the interests of the municipal council at the expense of the interests of their communities.

Often, ward committees were starved of vital information through a variety of ways, including delays in making information available and presentation of information in ways that were unfriendly and inaccessible to ward committee members. This impacted negatively on the effectiveness of the WCS as a conduit for public participation.

Another major finding was the understanding of public participation as a depoliticized phenomenon, without implications for interests, power and control. Findings revealed that often different groups and individual engaged in public participation for different, and often conflicting, interests. For instance, in some instances, municipal councils used public participation as conduit for legitimation of already concluded issues, whilst ward committees believed that the invited spaces created were for them to serve as a voice of their communities. This was often obvious where invited spaces for engagement were shut down and ward committee members found themselves as "spectators" of the processes with which they were supposed to engage.

Tied to this was the misconception that everybody wants to participate, a view that was oblivious of the fact that there may be a range of variables that might impact on public participation. For instance, people may not participate in public participation activities because they do not believe that participating will serve their interests. In addition, people may participate at specific stages of public participation and not others because they believe that their participation will matter in those stages.

Therefore, the mix structural, political, social, economic and operational dynamics operated to produce both dysfunctionalities and functionalities in the WCS in GKM.

- **The functionality of ward committees is often weak and varied, and depends on contexts and agency of ward committees and ward committee members.**
  Findings revealed that the WCS in GKM was generally weak, and did not serve to provide real opportunities for public participation. Instances where ward committee members had pushed back and trumped forces of dysfunctionality were few and insignificant. Although ward committee members knew what their roles and responsibilities were, this could not assist them to make the system effective, or to utilise the invited space provide by the WCS to enhance public participation. For

instance, the overdependence of ward committee on the council served to weaken their agency to generate creative solutions to the problems facing the ward committee system.

7.3 Recommendations for Enhanced Public Participation through the Ward Committee System

7.3.1 Recommendations to policy makers

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for policy makers to consider regarding the WCS as a vehicle for public participation:

- Section 152(e) of the Constitution states that the "… the objective of local government is to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government" (RSA, 1996). Flowing from this, DLG was adopted as a framework that must foreground public participation. However, findings of this study pointed to a possibility that, although the WCS is in place, there were concerns around its effectiveness. These emanated largely from the design, political and operational aspects. There is therefore a need for policy to clear these issues to level the ground for authentic public participation as spelt out in the Constitution (1996).
- Public participation is a political phenomenon, characterised by interests, power and control. Finding of the study revealed that public participation was often constructed as a technical exercise, a view that was oblivious of the underlying political configurations and undertones of public participation. There is therefore a need to foreground this aspect in policy to ensure that there are opportunities for authentic public participation, and that invited spaces are created for communities to engage effectively in IDP planning at a local government level.

7.3.2 Recommendations to municipal councils

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for municipal councils to consider regarding the WCS as a vehicle for public participation:

- Findings of this study revealed political interference in the constitution of ward committee. Municipal councils, as a structure that presides over the constitution of ward committees, must ensure that ward committees are insulated from party political interference. For instance, ward councillors, as chairpersons of ward committees, must

desist from using the platform provided by the ward committee to advance agendas of their political parties.

- Findings reveal that there are often delays in ensuring that ward committees have access to vital information required for them to support their communities, and that when this information is made available, it is often presented in the format that is unfriendly and inaccessible to ward committee members. There is a need for municipal councils to ensure that the information is released timeously and that the format is appropriate to the profiles of ward committee members to ensure that ward committees are effective as a conduit for public participation.

- Findings revealed that, in some instances, ward committee members were unsure about their roles and responsibilities and how this interfaced with service delivery issues. Municipal councils need to ensure that a training and development package is in place to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for ward committees to execute their mandate.

7.3.3 Recommendations to ward committees

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for ward committees to consider regarding the WCS as a vehicle for public participation:

- Findings reveal overdependence on municipal councils which erodes agency for creative solutions on the part of ward committees. There is a need for ward committees to wake up to the fact that, although they may require the intervention of municipal councils, they have the agency to make things happen.

- Findings reveal that participants requested that the stipend be elevated to some form of remuneration. Although such a proposal speaks to the needs of ward committee members as people, activism is not about monetary concerns; it is about working for social justice. From the point of view of this study, public participation is political, and therefore, ward committees should be driven by principles of activism.

7.3.4 Recommendation to higher education institutions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for higher education institutions to consider regarding the WCS as a vehicle for public participation:

- This study embraces the understanding that public participation constitutes an integral part of development planning processes at local government level. Already, the WCS exists as a mechanism that is in place as a conduit for public participation in South Africa. However, the WCS faces a myriad of challenges, ranging from design, political, social and operational aspects. There is therefore a need to explore various ways in which the WCS as a vehicle for public participation could be strengthened and differentiated so that it is deployable to a variety of contexts. This could require studies in contexts where the WCS seems to be working well as a conduit for authentic public participation.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

It is important for any study to put a lens on itself to be able to justify its conclusions and gain perspectives regarding the implications of its findings. The major limitation of this study is that data was generated from a few participants from a restricted geographical area (i.e. GKM). Thus, the findings of this study may not be representative of what occurs in other settings with a different set of variables, especially those that are in towns and cities. However, generalising findings to other contexts was not the intention of this study. The main aim was to reveal certain patterns regarding the experiences of ward committee members from GKM, of the WCS as a conduit for public participation.

In addition, a further limitation to this study was the tight timeframe within which the study was to be completed as part of a qualification. Thus, there was not enough time to follow up on all the issues that could have been explored in greater depth in the study. Hence, there is a need to provide possibilities for further research.

7.5 Areas for Further Research

The following possibilities for further research are recommended based on the findings and limitations of this study:

- As suggested earlier, the findings of this study may not adequately represent what is occurring in other contexts. Therefore, there is a need to expand the current research theme to other contexts to come to a more objective understanding of the theme.
- This study asserts that public participation is an integral part of development planning processes at local government level. Already, the ward committee system exists as a conduit for public participation in South Africa. However, the WCS faces a myriad of challenges, ranging from design, political, social and operational aspects. There is therefore a need to explore various ways in which the WCS as a mechanism to

enhance public participation could be strengthened and differentiated so that it is deployable to a variety of contexts.

7.6 Summary

The WCS is an integral part of the efforts to democratise development, and give expression to the aspirations of DLG. This study revealed that the effectiveness of the WCS as a conduit for public participation is marred with a catalogue of challenges, ranging from design, political and operational aspects. Part of the problem is the conceptualisation of public participation as a politically insulated construct. Public participation is about group and individual interests, which may be contested and conflicting. Interests are a product of power relations in society. Therefore, public participation needs to be configured around discourses of interests, power and control as they play out in society, and that there will be different expectations from different groups and individuals as to why public participation is deployed.

Ward committees are intended to serve as a voice of the communities that they represent. However, findings of this study revealed that ward committees are often perceived by communities as “agents” of political parties and municipal councils. When this happens, the constitutional promise of public participation is compromised, and public participation begins to serve itself and communities become its spectators.

In conclusion, the WCS presents a real opportunity for meaningful public participation. However, the WCS can only serve as conduit if relevant mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the WCS serves as a site for transformation and supports the transformation of power relations with regards to public participation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Focus group interview guide

1. What made you, or motivated you to, participate as a ward committee member?
2. What role you should play as ward committee members?
3. What do you understand by public participation?
4. What do you think about the ward committee participation in GKM and in what ways would you say GKM is encouraging public participation?
5. Do you think ward participation has any positive influence or adds any value to the municipal programmes? What are those programmes (if any)?
6. What are the challenges of being a member of ward committee?
7. What can be done to overcome these challenges?
8. How do community members perceive the role of ward committee members?
9. Do you think you have access to enough information to enable you to perform your roles successfully?
10. What do you think can be improved about the functioning of the ward committees in general?
11. Do you have something in general to say about the ward committee system in your municipality?

Appendix 2A: Invitations to Participate in the Study

To: _____

_____

Dear Sir/Madam

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

The above matter bears reference.

My name is Zuziwe Mbhele. I am postgraduate student at University of Stellenbosch, currently doing a Master's Degree in Public Administration under the School of Business. As part of my degree programme, I am expected to conduct and complete a thesis. My study is entitled **Interrogating the Ward Committee System: A Case Study of the Experiences of Ward Committee Members at the Greater Kokstad Municipality**.

I wish to invite you to participate in my research. A venue convenient to you will be organised and you will be invited here on a day and time of your choice. The researcher will ask you some questions, which will not require prior preparation but question themes will be distributed to you few days before or on the day of the interviews to alert you about the kind of information that will be sought. There may also be a research assistant who may help with the researcher with logistics as well as operate a tape recorder (if you are not opposed to it). The interview will take about thirty minutes to an hour of your time at the most.

Participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. You are fee to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalties and you may refuse to answer any question/s if you feel uncomfortable about it/them.

If you have any queries, questions or reservations about anything related to this research, do not hesitate to contact the undersigned at 083 760 5879 or Mr Francois Theron, who is my research supervisor at the following email address- Francois.Theron@spl.sun.ac.za. Once the study is finalised, I will provide you with the summary of the results.

Thank you for taking your time to consider participating in this research.

Yours faithfully

_____

MRS ZUZIWE MBHELE

Appendix 2B: Consent Form for Participating in the Study

I, _____ give consent to participate in the study. I fully understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalties and that I may refuse to answer any question/s if I feel uncomfortable about it/them. I also understand that my withdrawal will not affect my future relations with the researcher.

I am aware that if I have any queries, questions or reservations about any aspect of this study, I am free to contact the undersigned at 082 520 9501 or Mr Francois Theron, who supervises this study at the following email address: Francois.Theron@spl.sun.ac.za.

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix 2C: Consent Form for Audio Recording the Interviews

I, _____ give consent to have the proceedings of the interview tape-recorded. I fully understand that the intention is to make sure that all views, opinions and comments are accurately and correctly captured.

I am also aware that verbatim quotations will be made from the tapes but no real names of participants will be included in the research report.

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix 3: Request for Permission to Conduct Research

27 Mount Currie Drive
Extension 7
KOKSTAD
4700

31 July 2015

The Municipal Manager
Greater Kokstad Municipality
P O Box 8
KOSTAD
4700

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The above matter bears reference.

My name is Zuziwe Mbhele. I am postgraduate student at University of Stellenbosch, currently doing a Master's Degree in Public Administration under the School of Business. As part of my degree programme, I am expected to conduct and complete a thesis. My study is entitled **Interrogating the Ward Committee System: A Case Study of the Experiences of Ward Committee Members at the Greater Kokstad Municipality**. I am writing, firstly to request to be allowed to conduct research with the ward committee members, ward councillors and municipal officials who are involved in public participation. Their participation will be voluntary. Secondly, I further request that I do an interview with you as the Municipal Manager on matters related to ward participatory system.

There will be no implications of any kind to the municipality in this regard.

Yours faithfully

_____

MRS ZUZIWE MBHELE

Appendix 4: Permission to Conduct Research by GKM Council

GREATER
KOKSTAD
MUNICIPALITY
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

75 Hope Street
P.O. Box 8, Kokstad
Tel. +27 39 797 66 00
Fax. + 27 39 727 55 01
Email. info@kokstad.org.za
www.kokstad.org.za

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER

GREATER KOKSTAD MUNICIPALITY

Extract from the Minutes of the Ordinary Council meeting No. 23 held on Tuesday, 01 September 2015 at 10h00 at the **Council Chamber,** Kokstad.

Councillors (present)

ANC	:	**Speaker**, **Councillor** Z A Mhlongo **Mayor, Councillor** T N Jojozi **Deputy Mayor**, Councillor B M Mtolo **Councillor** M M Nondabula **Councillor** P Nocanda **Councillor** T O Madikizela **Councillor** N Mavuka **Councillor** N T Mqikela **Councillor** M N Dlakavu **Councillor** T M Mohlakoana
DA	:	**Councillor** N C Nyembezi **Councillor** K J Walker **Councillor** M N L Madikizela
AIC	:	**Councillor** V Ncukana

Councillors (absent)

ANC	:	**Councillor** L J Sithole (apology) **Councillor** P X Xelitole (apology)
DA	:	**Councillor** N C Nyembezi (apology)
Officials (present)	:	**Municipal Manager,** Mr Z J Mkhize **Executive Manager; Infrastructure, Planning and Development,** Mr A Velem **Executive Manager: Community Development Services,** Mr N Msiya **Admin Assistant,** Ms B Mzamo **Admin Assistant,** Ms N Notununu **Secretariat Intern:** Ms T Satywa

Officials (absent) : **Co-ordinator: Communication and IGR,** Mr S Ncwane (apology)

MINUTES

12.3.3 OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER: REQUEST TO USE THE GREATER KOKSTAD MUNICIPALITY FOR AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDY.

(File No:
(Author: Municipal Manager/ZJM)
(1st Level: Council: 01/09/2015)

1. RESOLVED

1.1. That Council noted the request from Mrs Zuziwe Mbhele for authorization to use Greater Kokstad Municipality to conduct an academic research study.

1.2. That Council approved the request from Mrs Zuziwe Mbhele for authorization to use Greater Kokstad Municipality to conduct an academic research study.

1.3. That Mrs Mbhele should give the copy of the final report, to the Municipality, for reference purposes.

NB: These Council minutes are subject to confirmation by the Council at its next Council Meeting.

CERTIFIED A TRUE EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 01 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 10H00 AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, KOKSTAD.

9/9/2015
DATE

MR Z J MKHIZE
MUNICIPAL MANAGER